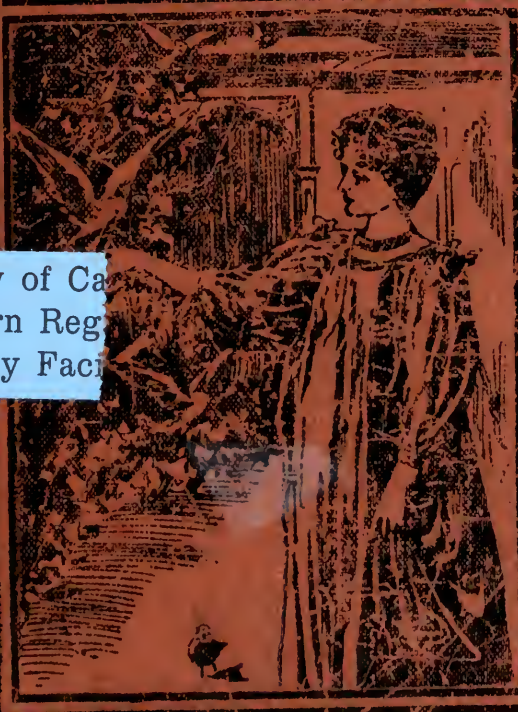
# THE WHITE DOVE OF AMRITZIR

A ROMANCE OF ANGLO-INDIAN LIFE

ELIZA F. POLLARD



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THE WHITE DOVE OF AMRITZIR.

"AT THE FIRST SOUND OF HER STEP, DOVES OF ALL SHADES CAME FLYING DOWN." [p. 20.

# THE WHITE DOVE OF AMRITZIR.

## A Romance of Anglo-Indian Life.

BY

ELIZA F. POLLARD,

AUTHOR OF

ROGER THE RANGER," "TRUE UNTO DEATH," "BROWNIE," ETC.

"If love is not worth loving, then life is not worth living,
Nor aught is worth remembering, but well forgot;
For store is not worth storing, and gifts are not worth giving,
If love is not."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

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# THE WHITE DOVE OF AMRITZIR.

## CHAPTER I.

### A TRIO.

"KASAN SINGH, how dare you!" and the speaker sprang up from before the table, at which he had been working, and looked down with an expression of mingled anger and pity at a man, crouching at his feet, muttering words in a strange tongue, but which, nevertheless, conveyed to the mind of the hearer a distinct idea of prayer and incantation.

Far from being repulsed by the angry ejaculation, Kasan Singh's voice rose, as he dragged himself to where the officer stood, and then prostrated himself on the ground until his forehead touched the Englishman's feet.

It was truly a strange scene. The first rays of the early morning sun, penetrating through the uplifted canvas, which formed the doorway, lit up the interior of a large, military tent. A huge Pathăn, whose dark face was rendered still fiercer by his long hair, heavy black whiskers and moustache, stood at the entrance, a revolver in his hand, whilst in a corner half a dozen natives, clad in yellow robes with blue turbanned heads, crouched with outstretched hands, gazing in the direction of their comrade and of the man he was evidently adoring.

John Nicholson was of commanding presence, over six feet in height; his face was perfectly colourless, and he wore a long black beard; but the most remarkable feature in his face were his eyes. They were large grey eyes, with black pupils, which, under the excitement of the present moment, were dilated and shone so fiercely that they resembled a tiger's at bay.

There was another occupant of the tent to whom we must needs introduce our readers—Sir Hubert Pennington, who was seated at a table opposite the one from which Nicholson had just risen. He was a younger man than his companion by six or seven years, with a handsome, thoughtful face, fair hair, and long yellow moustache.

At the present moment he was leaning back in his chair, smiling a quizzical smile, evidently much amused at the scene which was being enacted before him, and the smile broke into a laugh when Nicholson exclaimed,—

"Faith! and it's more than a man who calls himself a Christian can stand!"

Then the frown deepening on his brow and his eyes glaring fiercely, he continued in native dialect,—

"You know the penalty of your sin, Kasan; I am weary of telling you it is a sin, and a monstrous one, to worship a man who is no better than yourself, nay, perhaps not half as good. If reason will not prevent your making fools of yourselves, then there is nothing left but the cat-o'-nine tails. Three dozen strokes! That was what I announced publicly as the punishment of idolatry, and such idolatry! It is perfectly revolting! As I have said, it must not be allowed; I will *not* pardon."

He turned his back on the man who crouched at his feet, and who still muttered in tones of rapture,—

"My lord is very gracious thus to chastise his servant. He is heaven-born, and knows our sins and short-comings."

Then rising from the ground he salaamed low, retreating backwards towards the entrance of the tent. He was followed by his companions, Mirza the Pathăn bringing up the rear.

When they had disappeared, Nicholson threw himself into a low wicker chair, and groaned aloud. Sir Hubert watched him curiously for a few seconds; then he said,—

"You do not really mean to have the fellow flogged?"

"Not mean it!" exclaimed Nicholson passionately. "Do you suppose I would have given the order if I had not meant it to be carried out! For what would those fools take me, if I were not as good as my word?"

"But——" began Hubert Pennington.

"I know what you would say," interrupted Nicholson, "that it is an excessive punishment for a mere breach of discipline. I allow it is; but they were warned, the thing must be put a stop to, and the fellows know I never retract. There! I am disgusted with the whole business," saying which he rose, and began pacing up and down the tent. "I wish I were you, Pennington, going on leave. Indeed, I have a great mind to throw the service up altogether, go home, and get some appointment in England. I have just missed the Crimea, worse luck!"

"You would never do that," said Pennington.

"Why not?" answered Nicholson, stopping in his impatient walk and looking at Pennington.

"Because you are a personage out here—I might say a necessity," answered the younger man; "your influence is unbounded with the natives. If ever there should be a row, which we all know may happen any day, I believe the Sikhs would follow you to a man."

"I believe they would," said Nicholson, softened, and there was even a certain satisfaction in the changed tone of his voice; "but at the same time," he continued, "I do

not appreciate the form their devotion takes; it is abhorrent to me."

Pennington laughed.

"Why take it to heart?" he said; "if it pleases them to believe their prophet Gourou Govind has been re-incarnated in you, it does you no harm—in fact, it is highly complimentary. Certainly the idea from our point of view is absurd, but you have done nothing to encourage it: rather the contrary. And seeing, morally, you are not responsible, and that evidently nothing you can say will drive it out of their heads, the only advantage to be obtained from it is, that as long as they are convinced of your double existence they will follow you to the death. Why should you not make the most of this idea? Your influence is good, you do not deceive them, you can do no more. Listen!"

And rising he went to the opening of the tent, and withdrew the curtain.

There came wafted towards them on the clear, fresh morning air many voices, intoning a sort of hymn in which the most distinguishable words were, "Gourou Nikkal Scynes."

"I wish they would stop their noise!" exclaimed Nicholson.

"Let be," said Pennington; "we all have our ideals, even we cold-blooded northern men, who are unwilling to be credited with the most shadowy virtues. These Sikhs look upon you as the wisest and bravest of men, and worship you as the ancient Greeks worshipped the gods and demi-gods: it is a sort of hero-worship, by no means to be despised."

"I do not agree with you," answered Nicholson. "It is humiliating. I feel myself far from being the most shadowy of heroes."

Sir Hubert did not answer; he was thinking how little the man knew his own value. For the last two years he had been John Nicholson's daily, almost hourly, companion. Sent by Government into the hill country immediately after the annexation of the Punjab, in a semi-military, semi-political capacity, Nicholson wielded almost unlimited power wisely and so well that he effectually brought the wild tribes into submission, often without bloodshed. His rule was firm and just, but above all things it was merciful, and the Sikhs, until then untameable, had submitted to his authority, had endured his discipline and training, and, strange to say, had grown in time to worship him. Only those who have studied the character of this strange people can conceive the possibility of such a position, can enter into it, and realise that it is by no means imaginary.

There are only two levers strong enough to overcome prejudice and break down social barriers—namely, religion and love; these two working together accomplish miracles, and no power can withstand their influence.

In that wild life, amongst that wild people, John Nicholson had shown himself bravest amongst the brave, merciful to the fallen, not crushing the conquered, but wise in his judgments; so they loved him, and he became their master, and they yielded him willing obedience.

Sir Hubert Pennington was in point of fact as devoted to his superior officer as the very humblest Sikh; he admired and believed in him; but such feelings in Englishmen seldom find expression in words, and so the two men to outward appearances were nothing more than good comrades.

Sir Hubert Pennington was about six-and-twenty, and, as we have said, Nicholson's junior by several years. He succeeded before he came out to India to his grandfather's

title and estates, and was the last of his race. Until he became acquainted with Nicholson he had lived a superficial life, having no family ties to call strong feelings into play. He had never known his father, and hardly remembered his mother. When not at school he had spent his time in the old Bedfordshire home with his grandfather, Sir Roger Pennington; the old man had suffered much in his affections and his pride, seeing his children die off one by one until only this grandson remained to him. One can never account for the vagaries of human nature, and unnatural as it may seem, Sir Roger, to use a common expression, did not "take" to his grandson. He seemed to feel a sort of angry jealousy against this boy, his heir, in default of the noble sons whom he had so proudly sent forth into the world. He felt he should never live to see him grow into a man; his soul was bitter within him; and the boy, with all a child's strong instincts, was keenly alive to the fact, and resented it.

His grandfather took but little notice of him, suffering his presence, and letting him come and go, without showing either pleasure or pain.

Only when Hubert intimated his intention of becoming a soldier like his father he turned round upon him, and said bitterly,—

"If you do this thing, when I am gone, what will become of the old house?"

He could not realise that his heir had no attachment for a place which had never been home to him, except in name.

"Oh! I shall come back some day, I suppose," he answered carelessly, "but I must see the world first."

His grandfather looked at him from under his shaggy eyebrows, and said,—

"Good! go and see the world, and die as your father did, leaving your heritage to strangers."

It was his solitary protest; he sent his grandson to Haileybury, and afterwards to the Rev. W. Clifford to prepare for Woolwich. It was at this time that his grandfather died and the young man succeeded to the title and estate; this fact did not, however, alter his determination.

"What should I do alone at Basset Hall?" he said to Mr. Clifford, when that gentleman asked him his intentions for the future. "I wish to live, not to vegetate. Being the possessor of a few thousands a year will not suffice to turn me into a country squire. There are enough of them in the land already. I desire to be something more."

So he went to Woolwich, and came out amongst the highest. This was partly owing to his unusual abilities, and partly because he was by nature ambitious. The desire to succeed was born in him; he had never been satisfied with a second place when there was a possibility of winning the first.

He went out to India in the Royal Engineers, and before long his chiefs were agreed that if he got the chance he would make his mark.

In his second year of service he was ordered to the Punjab, and came under the command of Captain Nicholson, political agent for the newly annexed province. The Punjab being a non-regulation province, military and civil appointments were frequently held by one and the same man, who was expected to do the work of two; and generally did manage to accomplish his multifarious duties satisfactorily. They often laughingly called themselves, "Jacks of all trades."

It was a good school for a young man, though often a hard one; fortunately the chiefs who held the highest posts were men of rare moral excellence. From the first hour of their acquaintance Hubert Pennington conceived

an intense admiration for John Nicholson, which developed into a devotion such as is never experienced for a fellow-man twice in a lifetime.

To remain with him, he willingly sacrificed more than one chance of preferment, desiring nothing better than to take him for his model, and be a hero even as he was.

Nicholson fully appreciated not only the young engineer's personal devotion, but his superior talents and the zeal he manifested in his profession. His powers were put fully to the test, for the work of surveying the new hill country, making forts, bridges, and roads, and bringing tribes into subjection, was no child's play; it demanded great self-denial and the endurance of many hardships without flinching; and Sir Hubert Pennington had proved himself equal to the occasion.

But after several attacks of fever it was thought advisable that he should take a short furlough, and go home to recruit; about the same time Nicholson had been nominated deputy commissioner at Lahore, and at the present moment they were on their way to that town.

"Here comes Futtih Singh," said Pennington, throwing away the end of his cigar; "he must have heard that there has been a row, and is, as usual, bent upon making peace—a rare quality in one of his race."

"There is not another man in all the native tribes to equal Futtih Singh," said Nicholson. "I have a great friendship for him."

As he spoke he stepped out of the tent and went forward to meet his guest.

It was early morning; a soft, fresh breeze was blowing; the camp had been pitched on an immense flat plain, to the north of which rose the mighty Himalayas, with their crown of lasting snows glittering and sparkling in the early sunlight. Tents of every size and description

were scattered over the plain, suitable to the needs of the various tribes and native chiefs assembled there under British rule.

From his tent the tall figure of the rajah, Futtih Singh, was seen advancing. He was a handsome man, in the prime of life, muscular and agile, the *beau idéal* of a Sikh warrior. He wore the blue pagio (turban), consisting of a long narrow piece of linen; and the hair, which by the Sikhs (in contradistinction to the Mohammedan usage) is allowed to grow long, is gathered into this cloth, and fastened either on the front or on the side of the head, in such a way that neither end nor knot is visible, whilst the other end hangs half-way down the back. A jewelled aigrette ornamented the front of the turban; the heavy black whiskers and thick moustache were brushed up towards the eyes, giving a fierce expression to a face which otherwise would have been strangely sad and pathetic. His dress consisted of the angraka (coat), which, fastened over the chest with enormous jewels, reached to the knees; beneath it long full trousers fell in folds to the ankle; over the whole was thrown a mantle lined with leopard's skin. The Sikh colours, yellow and green, were predominant in these garments. Heavy gold and emerald rings hung from his ears, and strings of emeralds and diamonds were coiled round his neck, to which were attached costly pendants. Altogether, he had a dazzling effect as the rays of the morning sun poured full upon him.

At a short distance from his tent Nicholson met and saluted him; the chief responded with frank courtesy, saying in his soft native dialect,—

"Sahib, you have been offended again. I am grieved."

"I am grieved also, Futtih Singh," said Nicholson, "more especially as I have been obliged to resort to

harsh measures; for you must understand it is against the rules of our religion to suffer any man to bow down and worship us, and I cannot sanction it. We worship one God, none other."

"I know you have told me so," said Futtih Singh; "but you do not understand my people and our faith. Will you listen while I make clear to you, O great Sahib, the high honour which has fallen upon you, and which you do not recognise as such?"

"I will listen," said Nicholson, "though I pretty well know all you have to say;" and he led the way into his tent.

The Sikh salaamed to Pennington and then seated himself on the carpeted floor, whilst the two Englishmen threw themselves into low wicker chairs.

"Sahib," said Futtih Singh, "when the breath departs from your mortal frame, whither think you goes that essence which we call Life?"

A puzzled look came over John Nicholson's face, and he answered somewhat sharply,—

"I am no theologian. I believe what my mother taught me, but the mysteries of the other world I do not even strive to fathom. To do my duty, to serve my Queen, my country, and my fellow-men, to be honest and true—such is my code; and when I come to die, be it on the battle-field or in my home with those I love around me, I shall pray for God to have mercy on my soul, not for my own merit, but for the Christ's, my Redeemer."

"And you will go hence and be no more?" asked the Sikh.

"I shall go hence," answered Nicholson reverently, "but I shall still be—my soul cannot die; more than this is beyond human knowledge. But why do you ask? In what can my faith in the unknown future affect you?"

he exclaimed impatiently, angry at being called upon to speak of hidden feelings to which so few men care to give utterance.

In the rajah's dark eyes a glow of light had shot forth.

"You will come back," he said in a tone of assurance, "even as you *have* come back. You do not know, but *we* know; you are not what you seem."

"I wish he would stop that," said Nicholson; "it is uncanny. He is going to make out I am somebody who lived hundreds of years ago."

"If that is all," retorted Pennington, "and it can make him happy, let him have it out; it can't hurt you. Go on, Futtih Singh," he continued; "tell us who Nicholson is according to your idea."

"He is Gourou Govind Singh! It was revealed to Kasan Singh in a dream," answered the rajah.

"Oh!" said Nicholson, "will you explain how this happens?"

The Sikh shook his head.

"It was revealed, I tell you. Kasan Singh saved your life in battle; in return you saved his son Mirza's in that last fray, when you carried him through the enemy's ranks on your saddle-bow. From that hour Mirza was set apart for your service, and not only he, but every Pathăn watches over your life; you are sacred in their eyes."

"That is pure gratitude. What has it to do with your Gourou Govind?" answered Nicholson.

"You do not know the history of our great prophet," said the Sikh. "Listen. Gourou Govind slew a Pathăn by pure accident, and his remorse at having taken a man's life, except in battle, was very great. He sent for the son of the murdered man and made him costly gifts. Not satisfied with that, he told him it was his duty to

avenge his father and to slay him. The youth, knowing who Govind was, respected his person and fled; but one day, meeting him by chance, Govind so insulted him that in desperation the youth, drawing a dagger, plunged it into his tormentor. Even then the wound might have healed, but Govind, weary of life, frustrated the surgeon's skill and died."

"And you mean to say I am that Govind?" asked Nicholson.

"Aye, verily," replied Futtih Singh, "we believe it, and would do you honour accordingly."

"Well, I am sorry for you," said Nicholson; "I can merely repeat what I have already tried to impress upon you—namely, that I am a man like yourself. And I do hope you will let me see and hear as little as possible of this superstition. I cannot prevent it, but I will not sanction it. If it were possible, I would absent myself from amongst you all, until you came to your senses."

Futtih Singh smiled again.

"Govind left his people, travelled and fought, and suffered; when he died they built the shrine at Amritzir, where they worship him. The holy never die; they are only unseen for a time, until they are born again."

He ceased speaking, and bowed; his forehead nearly touched the ground.

"There, let him have his own way, Nicholson," said Sir Hubert. "What is the use of arguing? I daresay Govind was a very good sort of fellow, and that you may consider yourself highly honoured. Let us ride to see how the bridge over the ravine is getting on. Will you come with us, Futtih Singh?"

The rajah rose and answered courteously that he would gladly accompany the English officers. Half an hour later, well escorted, the three men rode out of the camp.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE WHITE DOVE.

WE have already said that Futtih Singh was of high rank; his father had held office with the late Maharajah Runjeet Singh, and he had succeeded to almost fabulous wealth. Before the annexation of the Punjab he possessed vast tracts of land under the protection of the British, besides those awarded him by Runjeet Singh, amounting almost to the area of a province. In the neighbourhood of Lahore and of Amritzir his palaces excited the wonder of all beholders, but round the one at Amritzir a strange mystery hovered.

A white marble palace lay hidden amidst a grove of trees, invisible from beyond the surrounding walls, and resembling a substantial English summer-house. At a little distance rose the square towers of a tikana, or underground dwelling-house, which was reached from the palace by subterranean passages. It was one of Futtih Singh's summer residences. Being below ground it was always cool, and consisted of magnificent halls built of stone, with broad corridors all round, supported on massive pillars richly carved and ornamented. Around these two buildings were lovely gardens filled with the choicest trees and flowers; the mingling scent of orange and jasmine would have been overpowering save for the waters of the numerous fountains which

played in every direction, refreshing and cooling the atmosphere.

The day was dawning; the cooing of the doves nestling on the low roof of the marble dwelling-house was the only sound to be heard, until suddenly the stillness was broken by the rustling of the heavy silken curtains which fell across the entrance to the verandah, and a young girl stepped forth. She was clad in pure white, her tunic richly embroidered in pearls; strings of the same precious stones encircled her neck and bound back the soft, wavy *cendré* hair. Her complexion was exquisitely fair, with the very faintest rose blush just tinging her cheeks; whilst the deep blue eyes gazed forth with a look almost of wonder on the calm loveliness around her.

At the first sound of her step on the thickly matted verandah, doves of all shades, from the purest white to every tint of blue, came flying down, settling at her feet, upon her shoulders, in her fluffy hair. A tiger crouching at the entrance of the portico rose, and, stretching his huge limbs, fawned upon her. She laid her hand upon his head and smiled, such a happy child-like smile, in which there was no shadow of regret, no straining after unrealised joys. The girl's face was simply an unwritten page; there were no lines on the open brow, no drooping of the delicately curved lips, just parted, as if glad to breathe the sweet breath of life; under the long, dark lashes the eyes were wide open, with something in them of a child's vague, wondering expression. She was already tall, but evidently not fully grown, her figure slim and girl-like, with only the outlines of future womanhood visible beneath her clinging robe.

Such was Azile, called rather "the White Dove of Amritzir," the daughter of Futtih Singh. Her coming had been a mystery; the Sikh chief had brought her, an

infant of a few months old, into this empty dwelling-house; for her he had beautified it, and here she had dwelt from that time forth in perfect happiness.

She was surrounded by attendants. A native woman from the hills called Rhookia came with her, nursed her, and since had never left her. The widow of a Persian nobleman, made prisoner in the late wars, acted as governess and general manageress of the princess's household. The greatest care was taken as to those who should approach her, even in the most menial service. The grounds around the palace were so vast that she seldom went beyond their precincts; within those sheltering walls she was, however, as free as air, and, contrary to the usual custom, the soft breeze was allowed to kiss her uncovered face and lift the locks of fair hair resting on her brow.

She had no unsatisfied desire—those around her watched each look, anxious to forestall her every wish almost before she could express it. When as she grew older she displayed unusual intelligence, which did not escape her father's notice, he procured for her a "munshi" (wise teacher), an old man named Baasha Singh, who came to dwell in the tikana and superintend the princess's education. The rajah was himself a man of high intellectual powers, and had mastered many languages—Persian, French, and even a little English. He had been, as a youth, a great deal with the French general Allard, and had dwelt much with him, thus acquiring a knowledge of Western civilisation, and therefore he caused his daughter Azile to be instructed as few Eastern maidens were.

As the princess stood thus dreamily in the early morning on the steps of the verandah, there came forth from hidden nooks and crannies dusky maidens clad in soft, white robes, who gathered round her, some holding

chaste silver trays filled with fruits and flowers, others dainty dishes of sweetmeats and flagons of sparkling sherbet.

"My lord father will be here ere long," she said, smiling as she took the proffered fruit.

"The sun has barely risen, Princess," said one of her attendants.

"Then we will go forth to meet him," she answered, "on the road to Lahore."

"That can hardly be," said a tall, stout, middle-aged woman. "The princess forgets that my lord will be accompanied by two English sahibs; he has ordered the tikana to be prepared for them."

"I will go, nevertheless," said Azile, stamping her foot impatiently. "Bring my saree." *

She was obeyed; her ayah threw a double gossamer veil over her, which, with artful grace, draped her whole figure, shadowing, if not quite concealing, the fair face.

"Rhookia will go with me."

Then she clapped her hands twice, and in a few seconds there appeared coming with stately steps along the well-kept path leading to the palace a white elephant driven by his mahout; he carried his trunk perpendicularly in the air, which is a sign of great joy and satisfaction.

As soon as he came in sight of the princess he knelt. Futtih Singh had had this elephant brought from Ceylon for the princess; his tusks had been carefully sawn off within two feet, and then tipped with silver and precious stones. A cloth of silver, richly embroidered and fringed with pearls, almost entirely covered his back. Upon a cushion of white cashmere rose the howdah, also of pure white, glistening with silver and jewels, and surrounded by white silk curtains.

* Veil.

"Mowgli, come," said the princess, holding out her hands filled with fruit.

Mowgli rose, and, coming to the steps of the portico, gently gathered the fruit into his trunk; then, at the mahout's bidding, he knelt once more, and by means of a silken ladder the princess took her seat in the howdah with Rhookia, her nurse, beside her.

Gently, as if he realised the value of his burden, Mowgli rose, and the white cavalcade moved down beneath the avenue of trees, the doves following, whirling round and dropping from time to time to rest in their circling flight on the silk curtains of the howdah.

After a quarter of an hour's journey—for elephants are not given to hurrying—they reached a high gate built in the walls which surrounded the estate. The mahout drew up and looked back at his mistress.

"We will go through on to the high-road," she said, with an air of authority.

The gates were thrown open, and they passed out.

"You are curious to see the sahibs, Ranee?" said Rhookia.

"Truly I am," answered Azile; "I have never seen an English sahib, and my father has promised me I shall have sight of these two. It seems that one is a holy man, a prophet, and the Sikh warriors worship him; they say he is a Gourou. The other is only a chief."

"So I have heard," said Rhookia.

"Ranee, here they come," said the mahout.

Pushing aside her silken curtains, Azile looked forth, and distinguished at some distance coming along the road three riders followed by their syces.*

The two Europeans were mounted on splendid Arab steeds, and between them on a richly caparisoned

* Grooms.

horse rode Futtih Singh, arrayed as we have already described.

We need scarcely say that the two Englishmen were John Nicholson and Sir Hubert Pennington. They had reached Lahore with Futtih Singh a few days previously, and upon his proposing a visit to the shrine of Amritzir had readily accepted the proffered hospitality of his splendid palace in the neighbourhood, the fame of which had reached them, as also the mysterious story of his daughter, "the White Dove."

Futtih Singh was a proud, silent man, and neither his own people nor strangers ventured to interfere with his private concerns. The English Government knew him to be faithful to British rule, and a man influential both by his family and his wealth. The officials were directed to pay him all due respect, and even to humour him. The peculiar position which John Nicholson occupied in his relations with the Sikhs, and the special honour they vouchsafed to him, had brought about a close intimacy between the two men, cemented by personal esteem, so that they ever met with pleasure and parted with regret.

Lahore is about thirty-five miles distant from Amritzir, but Futtih Singh's palace was a couple of miles nearer. They had therefore left Lahore before dawn to avoid the heat. Passing through Main Mir, the military station, and leaving the ruins of ancient Lahore behind, they pursued their way for some distance over an almost desert plain. Suddenly, the landscape changed, and they traversed fine, cultivated land, which as they advanced continued to improve.

This was the property of Futtih Singh, and he bestowed upon it the most careful husbandry—rude, perhaps, according to our ideas of agriculture, but far superior to that of the usual Indian landowner.

Verily they rode through a land of wells and gardens planted with huge trees, the mango and the broad-leaved mahŭa; little villages nestled under the green hills amid the palms, whilst birds sang their morning songs from neighbouring thickets, and jungle cocks began to crow.

Through this peaceful scene, at a sudden turning of the road, there came into view Azile's white cavalcade with the cloud of doves whirring around it, and its whiteness glowing in the golden light of the fresh flush of early dawn. It resembled a transformation scene. Involuntarily the two Englishmen checked their horses and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It is my daughter," said Futtih Singh, and the colour deepened under the dark brown skin. "She is my best beloved, my heavenly born, the White Dove of Amritzir. She heard of my coming, and has ridden forth to meet me."

It would have been against native etiquette for Futtih Singh to pause or to give any sign of recognition, so they passed on; the elephant turned also, and slowly followed with its steady tramp.

Excited by a natural curiosity, Sir Hubert Pennington looked back, and as he did so the soft morning breeze caught the silken curtain of the howdah, and he saw for the space of a second a face which he was destined never to forget, an angel's face with an aureole of fair hair, and deep blue eyes. The vision flashed before him and was gone.

"That is no Indian girl," he thought; "who can she be, and what is she doing here?" but he said nothing.

A feeling crept over him that he was in the presence of a mystery. Would it ever be solved? And with the unanswered question in his heart, he rode forward to join his companions.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE SHRINE OF AMRITZIR.

WHEN Futtih Singh and his companions reached the palace, they entered the grounds by a magnificent gateway, quite in an opposite direction to the one by which Azile had left. For though the tikana could be reached from the marble palace, it was by subterranean passages, and Futtih Singh and Baasha Singh alone knew the secret. Both buildings, though in the same grounds, were therefore entirely separated. The guests were met by a veritable host of officials and servants, and conducted down marble steps into the superb apartments which had been prepared for them. A marble tank of pure water, from which fountains rose, was surrounded by a colonnade, the delicate pillars of which were richly carved. Thick carpets covered the floors, deadening the sounds of footsteps. The roof of the gallery was painted with arabesques of gold and many colours, all softly blended; out of this gallery opened rooms screened from view by purdahs of sweet-scented cusca-grass, and furnished after the Eastern fashion with great magnificence. The walls were hung with gold brocade; Kashmeerian carpets covered the floors; cushions and low couches, silver and ivory wrought stools and chairs, were scattered everywhere in profusion. The light came softly through the fretted stonework, while distant strains of music charmed the senses. Groups of native

servants in their white robes and turbans sat and stood like statues in every possible niche and corner, ready to anticipate their master's slightest wish.

"We seem to have been suddenly transported to some scene of the Arabian Nights," said Sir Hubert, looking round; "have you ever seen anything like this before?" he asked his companion.

"Yes. In the Maharajah Runjeet Singh's palace at Lahore it was as magnificent, but I had no idea Futtih Singh went in for so much grandeur; he is only a rajah of the second order." He spoke in his quiet, unemotional voice. "This India is a wonderful nation," he continued. "I do not think we are at all aware how vast its resources are, or how deep-seated the religious prejudices of the people. If ever we should be unfortunate enough to rouse their religious enmity, we should have a bad time of it. I do not care even to think of what the consequences might be."

"There is no reason why we should," said Sir Hubert; "so far, we have steered clear of any such mishaps, and of course experience comes with time."

"I am not so sure of that," said Nicholson; "the atmosphere is stormy even at the present moment about those cartridges. Assurance often brings with it a lack of prudence. I have had on more than one occasion to speak a warning word to Government, though I must say they take little heed."

"You are a pessimist of the first order, Nicholson," said Sir Hubert, smiling, as he looked at the stern, colourless face of his companion; "and now let us take our bath, and afterwards to breakfast; our long ride has given me an appetite, if it has not had that effect upon you."

Here for the present we may leave them and return to "the White Dove."

Futtih Singh, after conducting his guests to the gates of the tikana, passed by his private entrance into the gardens belonging to the marble palace. He ascended to the verandah, and found there a meal ready, prepared by his own servant. It consisted of fruits, coffee, and cakes made from the finest wheaten flour. He partook of the repast, stretched on a silken couch, and drank clear water only. At the end he was served with a small quantity of the fiery liqueur to which the Sikhs are so passionately addicted.

He had scarcely finished, when, through the trees, the white elephant was seen winding its way towards the palace. Futtih Singh rose with, for an Oriental, a certain eagerness, and stood on the top of the marble steps.

The mahout stopped his animal, which immediately knelt. Azile slipped down, and, in less time than it takes to tell, ran forward and bowed low before her father, who, taking her by the hand, led her to where obsequious servants, having cleared away all signs of food, had spread piles of cushions for their mistress. Upon these she sank; then throwing back her saree and clapping her hands, she laughed.

"Father, I saw them."

"And thou art satisfied, spoilt child," he said, as he seated himself beside her.

"The one with the white face and the glittering eyes is the prophet, father, is he not?" she asked.

"He is," answered Futtih Singh.

She shook her head.

"He is too stern; I fear him. He is proud maybe, seeing he is a prophet and men worship him. The other has a gentler mien."

"Nay, Nicholson is not proud; it angers him to have it spoken of, even as it angered Govind himself," answered

Futtih Singh; "he says he is but a man, like unto other men. Moreover, our faith is not his faith; he has his own prophet."

The girl listened attentively.

"And by what name does he call his prophet?" she asked.

Futtih Singh hesitated for a moment; then he said, or rather attempted to pronounce, "The Christ."

"What know you about Him, father? Tell me," said the girl, with eager curiosity.

"There is little to know," he answered. "He was not great, like our Gourou Govind. He fought no battles, He did no great deeds; He wandered over the earth a mendicant, poor amongst the poor. But His followers resemble us, in that they recognise no castes; the highest Brahmin and the lowest Sudra are equal before their God. He suffered and He loved mankind; they say He died that they might live a second life; and so these Feringhees believe, as we do, that there is no death, only a change for better or for worse."

"That is well, that is well!" said Azile. "Tell me more. What became of their prophet Christ?"

"Such matters are not suited to thine age or sex, Azile," replied Futtih Singh. "See, here are thy maidens, fetching thee to the bath. Fare thee well."

And then, smiling, he just touched her head with his hand, and, rising, directed his steps towards a low door half hidden in the wall, pressed a spring, and disappeared.

For a time the maiden sat still, a puzzled look on her young face.

"Tulsa," she said suddenly, turning to her governess, who stood waiting for her, "are there many gods? are there many faiths?"

"Truly there are many. But why should they trouble you, Princess?"

"Why should they not trouble me?" said the girl, throwing back her head, whilst a strange light shone in her eyes. "Why am I alone to be free of trouble and of pain? I would like to suffer."

"Say not so; it is tempting the Supreme," said her governess. "Come to your bath."

And taking her hand, she led the young princess behind the curtains along the colonnade to a covered court, where in a marble tank was pure, translucent water flowing from reservoirs kept specially for the princess's use.

Futtih Singh had retired to his own apartments, and sat in deep thought, chewing the betel-nut which for the Sikh supplies the place of tobacco. His handsome face wore an expression of deep sadness. Suddenly, the curtain hanging over the entrance was pushed on one side, a servant entered, and salaaming to the ground, said,—

"Their Lord Sahibs are ready to receive your Mightiness."

"Let the horses be saddled in an hour," said the rajah, rising; "we shall ride before sunset to Amritzir."

So saying, he passed out along the colonnade until he reached the apartments occupied by the officers. Before entering, at the edge of the carpet he slipped off his richly embroidered gold and crimson shoes.

Nicholson rose to meet him, begging him to be seated.

"I have ordered the horses to ride to Amritzir this evening," said Futtih Singh, "as I have been informed that the Sahib Pennington is anxious to reach Delhi as quickly as possible. I have therefore arranged that there should be relays of horses, elephants, and camels ready to attend him as far as Loodiana. Leaving early, we can visit the holy shrines to-night, rest at Amritzir, and so he can be on his way to-morrow before dawn. You, I trust, Sahib Nicholson will return with me; I have a

communication I wish to make to you, and I therefore pray you grant me this favour."

"You know I am always glad to be in your company, Futtih Singh," answered Nicholson; "if I am back at Lahore the day after to-morrow it will suffice."

Nicholson rather wondered what the communication might be, but they were soon deeply engrossed in discussing what was at this time uppermost in every one's mind—namely, the introduction of the new cartridges. The two English officers did their utmost to prove to the rajah that there entered no unclean substance into their manufacture.

"I am persuaded of the truth of what you tell me," he said; "at the same time I am convinced the Sepoys will not accept your assurance. Already you have had trouble at Barackpore; rumours of discontent reach me daily. The old King of Delhi is not to be trusted, he is a tool in the hands of a bad woman: be warned and take precautions in time."

Before Nicholson could answer him, the khansamah * entered and announced, with low salaams, that the horses were ready saddled at the gates.

They therefore rose, made their preparation, and in a short space of time were on their way to Amritzir, which lay about two miles distant.

From the flat roof of the marble palace Azile witnessed their departure, seeing yet unseen. The roofs of Indian houses are the habitual resorts for all the members of the family; often in the hot weather they pass the short night there, seeking thus to throw off the languor which the heat of the pitiless sun renders so painful. Azile loved to dwell thus, and often would not descend for days together, save for her bath and a short stroll after sunset

* Head servant, butler.

in the lovely gardens of her palace amongst her flowers. Much as she loved the flowers she would never suffer her maidens to gather them.

"It is death to them," she would say. "Let them live; their perfume is sweet and they are pleasant to the eye; if mortal hand touches them they fade and die. Let be."

So no flower was ever culled in that garden; only morning and evening the mali * passed and nipped off the drooping blossoms, so that the princess should not grieve over her favourites.

All things that had life filled Azile with a deep, pregnant joy; the hour before sunrise was the happiest of all the day to her. The dawn of day never found her slumbering; she would lean over the parapet of her palace roof, gazing in admiring wonder at the trees covered with many-coloured blossoms—white, pink, scarlet—their sweet perfume ascending as if to greet her senses. Then she would laugh with clear, rippling laughter at the noisy mina-birds quarrelling with each other, or the screaming green parrots as they rose in the air and flew away to the nearest cornfield, there to despoil the patient husbandman of the fruits of his long toil. Many other sights and sounds greeted her in that shadowy dawn, until the short silver-grey twilight faded and the pitiless sun rose over the land, first crimson, then orange, then gold, scorching up the earth and taking the breath of life from man and beast. Thus it was that on this evening, hearing the tramp of horses, Princess Azile rose, and, looking forth, saw the three horsemen and their attendants pass on their way to the city of Amritzir. All day her spirit had been strangely heavy within her, but now there crept over her the, until then unknown, feeling of fear and loneliness, and so, burying her face in her hands, she wept.

* Gardener.

Her maidens gathered round her scared; in all her happy life they had never seen her weep. They could not know that a new conception, heralding a new birth, overshadowed that virgin soul. When she went forth in the early morning of that day she was but a child, but before sunset there had grown up within her the germ of a woman's heart, and therefore it was she wept.

It was a lovely Indian evening as Futtih Singh and his companions rode beneath the long baghs or groves of mango-trees on their way to Amritzir, and so beheld the golden dome of the Hari Mander glittering in the rays of the setting sun. The effect was almost magical, and, to the thoughtful soul, there was something grand and touching in this effort of human genius to produce a thing of beauty, worthy of that invisible God towards whom the immortal soul of man is for ever straining.

At this period Amritzir was the largest and most bustling city of the Punjab—far more so than Lahore. The wares exhibited in the bazaars, which extended down the long, busy streets, were the most beautiful productions of India. Persian and Kashmeerian goods, rich embroideries, magnificently set jewels—all were exhibited there for sale.

"Really," exclaimed Sir Hubert, as they wound their way with not a little difficulty through the busy streets, "as I am homeward bound, I should like to make some purchases; I shall not have such another chance."

To which suggestion Futtih Singh answered,—

"Let us visit the Temple first before the gates are closed, then we can dismiss our horses, return on foot, and you can make what purchases you will."

In the centre of a pool called Tulăo, which seems to draw its supply from a natural artesian well, is an island upon which is built the temple of Hari Mander. It is

reached by a bridge, at the entrance to which float two red banners. On one is written in large red letters "Wah garuji Re fatih," and on the other "Ram-Das," the name of the fourth Gourou Singh who dug out the tank and called it "Amrita Saras," or "The Spring of Immortality." In these sacred waters hundreds of pilgrims bathe daily; and to facilitate this bathing, stone steps lead down to the water, which is as clear as a mirror.

Having crossed the bridge and reached a door of solid gold, the principal entrance of the temple, Futtih Singh and his companions took off their boots and shoes previous to entering the holy precincts. Small buildings, inhabited by gourous and fakirs, rise opposite this entrance. From some fanciful-looking structures on the left hand they were greeted by the sound of lugubrious music. Futtih Singh poured a handful of rupees into a platter held out to him by a gourou; the Englishmen did likewise. Then Futtih Singh whispered something into the ear of one of his attendants, and he immediately disappeared. A curtain was suddenly thrown on one side, disclosing the chief gourou, clad in silk, seated under a canopy, and surrounded by what might be called a sort of court. The chief gourou had before him the holy book called Granth, out of which he was apparently reading. Futtih Singh proceeded to make a speech which caused evident emotion among those present, and from which Nicholson gathered that he was being introduced as the beloved and holy Gourou Govind Singh himself.

In a low voice he entreated Futtih Singh to desist; the Sikh salaamed low and muttered something which reached only the ears of the chief. Immediately a long line of fakirs came forth and deposited offerings at Nicholson's feet—turbans, cloths, etc. Nicholson retreated and made signs that he would accept no gifts.

The chief gourou muttered a prayer, then there arose a soft sound of music, and the fakirs prostrated themselves; but the two Englishmen retreated slowly until they once more reached the bridge, which they recrossed. When they found themselves safe on the other side, they both drew a long breath of relief.

"It was too bad of Futtih Singh," said Nicholson. "I shall tell him so." And leaving the shrine behind them, they remounted their horses and returned to the city.

They were already some distance up the street when they were joined by Futtih Singh. To Nicholson's reproachful "You should not have done this thing; it has annoyed me greatly," Futtih merely said, "Pardon me, sahib, it was a vow." But he hastened to add, "If you will allow me, I will take you to the best merchants, and see that you are cheated as little as it is in the nature of merchants to cheat buyers."

They could but accept, and for the next hour or so the two officers made away with a fair amount of rupees, but were at least perfectly satisfied with their purchases. They parted from Futtih Singh at the door of the best hotel in the town, the rajah arranging to come for Nicholson at dawn, when Pennington would take his departure for Loodiana.

"You will bring a mem sahib back with you, sahib?" he remarked to the latter, with that quick Oriental smile.

"I don't know that I shall," replied Sir Hubert. "It is dreary work for a man alone out here, especially in these parts, but it is worse for a woman."

And with that they parted.

"I have made up my mind never to marry out here," said Nicholson, as, lingering on the verandah of the hotel, he lit a cigar; "the life may be lonely, but the hourly anxiety for a woman one loves would be far worse, for

I believe dark days are coming. I am fully convinced that in our present life a man should have only himself to think of, and his duty."

"Hard lines," answered Sir Hubert thoughtfully, "but I daresay you are right."

The two men stood silently smoking, until they too parted for the night.

* * * * *

"I never accept a charge which I am not certain to be able to fulfil," said John Nicholson, slowly pacing up and down the long corridor of the tikana to which he and Futtih Singh had returned together.

"I know no man whom I can trust but yourself," answered the rajah; "I have told you the truth."

"I do not doubt it," answered Nicholson, "but there are many and insuperable difficulties in accomplishing what you ask. During the last fifteen years there have been many changes both in the British and Indian Governments; none know that better than you, Futtih Singh."

"But you are not like other men," the Sikh chief replied; "you can accomplish all things."

"You choose to think so," answered Nicholson, "but I know to the contrary. Besides, wherefore this haste? You are a hale and hearty man still, and there are no grounds for supposing that this foreboding of approaching death is anything more than a delusion."

"Nevertheless, I feel the shadow of it overhanging me, and my heart is heavy within me for the child of my love."

"Well," said Nicholson, "I will think the matter over, but my opinion is that with her immense wealth, if she has no natural protector, you should place her under the care of the British Government. She will then be perfectly

safe whatever betides. Personally, I should be incapable of affording her protection. I am only a servant of Government, and any day may be ordered to a different part of the country."

"I understand," said Futtih Singh; "I will see the notary, and he will put in writing my heart's desire. It shall be done as you say; you are a wise man and a holy."

"Nay, nay," said Nicholson, "not on that score will I accept the charge, but as your friend, and"—he hesitated a moment, then added, "for the sake of justice."

He had hardly finished these words when a couple of syces led two horses in front of the verandah.

"We will ride back to Lahore together, if you will?" said Futtih Singh, rising.

"Certainly," said Nicholson.

So the two men rode forth together, and as they passed beneath the low wall and grove of trees which formed the boundary of the marble palace there floated from the roof a white silken banner, and immediately a cloud of doves rose high in the air, and, strange to say, one snow-white bird with outspread wings swooped down and settled on the shoulder of the English officer.

"You see," said Futtih Singh, with a strange, melancholy smile, "it is the White Dove of Amritzir."

"I accept the token," said Nicholson, and turning round he raised his cap in acknowledgment of the white silken banner which still fluttered in the air.

## CHAPTER IV.

### TWO ENGLISH MAIDENS.

"RUBY!" and an old lady, stepping out into the flowered porch of Woodland Cottage, looked sharply around her.

She was a handsome old lady, leaning upon her ebony stick more from habit than because she really needed it; one of those delicate, fragile-looking women, whose appearance belies their strength. Traces of past beauty lingered in her face and figure, her complexion was still delicately fair, and the white hair under her black lace soft and abundant. Her whole person breathed intense refinement, even to the small white hands, now holding a packet of letters. Mrs. Melville had been a beauty in her day, and she knew it well; the coquetry of old age sat gracefully upon her.

"Ruby," she repeated, advancing on the well-kept lawn, which stretched in front of the little homestead, for the cottage was really nothing more. It nestled in a bend of the Surrey hills, which seemed to encircle it almost lovingly—a flowery nest, for the old walls were literally covered with creepers; roses, clematis, jasmine climbed over them in almost disorderly abundance. Flowers, in truth, grew rampant here—the very lawn was studded with tender blossoms; while beyond lay a vista of wooded upland, made gorgeous with clumps of rhododendrons of many shades, and still farther beyond the rosy white blossom of an apple orchard girted it round.

"Coming, grannie," and a girl stepped forth from under a tree, laden with may-blossom—a girl perfectly in unison with the scene around her, gracing it, even as Eve must have graced Eden. The old lady and the young girl were strikingly alike, at least as far as youth can resemble age. Ruby was aglow with life, in the first, fresh bloom of early womanhood, with the sunlight on her hair and perfect happiness in her bright, hazel eyes. She stepped so lightly over the grass that the flowers scarcely bent their heads before her.

"Well, grannie dear, what is it?" she said, throwing one arm round Mrs. Melville's shoulder. "Good news?"

"Yes," answered the old lady, smiling up at the girl, "a great surprise and a great pleasure."

"I am so glad," said Ruby enthusiastically; "it is seldom you are very glad, dear grannie, about anything."

"My very glad days, as you call them, Ruby," said Mrs. Melville, "are in the past; but this is an exception. Cannot you guess?" and she held the papers towards her—thin, closely written pages.

"From my father! Of course, the mail is due."

She paused, and the colour flushed up into her face.

"Surely he is not coming home?"

Tears, those wonderful tears of gladness which so seldom come to us in life, filled Mrs. Melville's eyes to overflowing, and her voice trembled as she said,—

"Aye, but he is, Ruby."

Then speechlessly the two clasped hands, the young heart and the old filled with those two purest loves of life—a mother's and a daughter's.

Silently, for full hearts rarely speak, they crept together under the hawthorn-tree, and Ruby, nestling up to grannie's side, said,—

"Let me see, dear."

Gently she took the flimsy papers, which contained so much joy, from the hands which were loth to part with them even for so short a space. The girl skimmed the pages rapidly.

"Why, grannie, he may be here directly. This is posted from Marseilles. Did you not see the postmark?"

"No," said Mrs. Melville, "I opened it so quickly."

"Well, the beginning was written in Calcutta, and the postscript at Marseilles. He may be here to-morrow!" and she laughed a gleeful laugh of pure joy.

"Six years!" said Mrs. Melville. "They have made me an old, you a young woman, Ruby. Shall you remember your father, dear?"

"Remember him! I was eleven years old when he was with us a whole year; what are you thinking of, grannie?" and she lifted her eyes from the letter she was reading. "Oh! this is a nuisance. He says another man, Sir Hubert Pennington, is coming with him, and that you know him. Why does he not go to his own people?"

"Because I strongly suspect he has none," answered Mrs. Melville; "let me see—Pennington—oh yes, I remember, they are the Bedford Penningtons. He must be his grandfather's heir, for Sir Roger lost all his sons; the eldest one died out in India—this must be *his* son. The old baronet is dead, I know."

"Well, I am sorry he is coming here," said Ruby, "for it will quite spoil father's home-coming. Now let us go into the house, grannie, for there are lots of things to do."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Melville, good-morning, Ruby," said another young girl, coming quickly across the lawn; "you look like two conspirators."

"Conspirators do not give utterance to their sentiments aloud as a rule," said Ruby; "but what brings you round so early, Kate?"

"Good news," answered the girl, "such good news!"

"Then we are all in the same box," said Ruby, smiling.

"Father had a letter this morning from a young fellow he coached for Woolwich, Hubert Pennington—Sir Hubert I ought to say; he's got furlough and is on his way home from India on sick leave. He has written to ask father to take him in. He was an awfully good fellow when I was a small girl. It will make a change in this dull hole."

"Come, come, Kate," said Mrs. Melville, "it seems to me, as your father's daughter, you ought to have plenty to do, and no need to grumble at dulness."

"A great deal more than I like, because it is of the wrong sort, Mrs. Melville," answered the girl. "Teaching in Sunday school, reading to old men and women, sewing flannel petticoats! I have done nothing else all my life. But never mind me; what is your good news, Ruby?"

"Father is coming home, and he mentions Sir Hubert Pennington as coming to Ashbourne; we thought he was bringing him here, and were not best pleased."

"I will leave you two to explain matters to each other," said Mrs. Melville, rising. "There is a good deal to do in the house, and Parkins must have her orders in time, or she will be in despair if the colonel arrives before she is ready for him."

Tapping Kate on the shoulder, she said,—

"Don't quite lose your head, Katie, at the idea of a real live officer honouring the vicarage with his presence," and so she left the girls together.

They were two very different types of girlhood—the beautiful, delicately refined Ruby, and the rough hewn, almost plain Kate Clifford. Yet, when one studied her face, she was not really plain—intellect and character combined in the deep-set, grey eyes and firmly closed lips; but there was no softness, it was as if the hard realities

of life had taken hold of this girl from her very birth and had moulded her. Everything about her was homely; the very cut of her morning cotton gown, and the cheap sailor hat which dangled from her arm, spoke of economy, that hard economy necessitated by the effort to keep up appearances. That such should be the case need not be wondered at, considering that Kate was the vicar's eldest daughter, that there were ten younger boys and girls, and that the living of Ashbourne was worth something under four hundred a year.

"So you thought Sir Hubert was coming here," she said, looking Ruby straight in the eyes.

"Oh yes; and I was so sorry," said Ruby. "You see, after all these years, I want to know my father, and a stranger would have decidedly been *de trop*."

"Ah well, you need not trouble," interrupted Kate; "he has written straight to father, offering most liberal terms, if he may make the vicarage his *pied-à-terre* for the next year. Of course it is a godsend to us—every little is—if only he won't mind the babies. I was a child when he went to India; he came out high at Woolwich, and did father much credit; he is in the Royal Engineers."

"Well, as you say, Katie," said Ruby, "if it causes you extra trouble, it will also be a help and give you something fresh to think of. I am glad you are pleased. Now I must really go, grannie will be wanting me; ta-ta," and she smiled and ran away.

Kate watched her, and a cloud came over her face.

"She has everything, and I have nothing," she said. "The first time he walks out of the vicarage gate, and across this lawn, he'll fall in love with her as sure as my name is Kate Clifford. It is not fair—rich and a beauty, poor and an ugly duckling." She brushed her hand across her eyes, as if to dispel a mist, then turning

away, walked across the lawn, swinging her straw hat in her hand with an almost angry look in her grey eyes.

She took her way along a narrow gravelled path, half hidden by shrubs, and lifting the latch of a little wicket gate crossed the road, and walking a hundred yards entered the vicarage grounds.

Actually it was as fair a home as the one she had just left. A pretty gabled house overshadowed by the old Norman church, the same wealth of flowers everywhere, and the same encircling, purple-heathered hills. But somehow the beauty brought no smile to Kate's lips; there was a mote in her sunshine.

"Kate, where have you been?" said Mrs. Clifford fretfully, as the girl stepped into the low-pitched dining-room; "why must you go out this morning when there is so much to be done?"

"I only went across to the Melvilles; and, mother, Colonel Melville is expected home—he and Sir Hubert are coming together."

"I am glad of it," answered her mother. "Sir Hubert at least will have a companion; it will be an inducement for him to remain here. Now we must set to work, there is so much to do, and you know, Kate, we must do our best for him. It will be such a help."

Kate sighed; always the old story, she thought.

"On the strength of his coming," her mother continued, "your father has decided to send Jack to school."

"Thank goodness! that will be a benefit at least. Don't trouble, mother," she added, "I will see to the room."

When Kate spoke like that Mrs. Clifford knew she could depend upon her. A more thorough-going girl it would have been difficult to find; practical and clear-headed, what she chose to do she did well; but, unfortunately, she did not always choose.

All that day she worked steadily, persistently, and before evening not only the spare bedroom but the drawing-room, which had gradually been growing shabbier and shabbier, and the dining-room, with its well-worn carpet, had assumed quite a festive air. She never stayed her hand until the spring day was drawing to a close; then with a sigh of relief she said,—

"There! that must do. I cannot make old things new."

"You have done wonders," said Mrs. Clifford. "What a good daughter you are, Katie!"

Kate started.

"No, I am not, mother," she answered.

Turning away, she left the room hurriedly, and ran up the stairs to the very top of the house, where there was a tiny attic, her sanctum, the one spot she could call her own, and throwing herself upon her bed, she burst into a flood of tears, exclaiming,—

"I wish I were good, I wish I were good! Poor mother; but then she chose her life, and I did not choose mine, and I have heard her tell that when she was a girl she had a good time. I have never had a good time. It is work morning, noon, and night; not to make two ends meet—we are not so ambitious—but just to keep things together; and there is no prospect of its ever being better. It is an unsolved problem how the boys are to be educated, and yet Willie is as clever and handsome a lad as any in the county, if he only had a chance. Thanks to Mrs. Melville I have had a good education, and I would go out as a governess, but mother wants me, and the younger ones must be taught. I see no end to it," and she sighed impatiently, "except to marry well!"

A blush overspread her face, and she laughed a short laugh.

For several years Kate had been the only girl. Six boys had followed each other in quick succession, and

thus it was natural the mother should turn to her little handmaiden for help. It is not fair to deprive the young of the careless, happy, spring-life which is theirs by the law of nature, and, once lost, will never come back again. The fresh, green spring-joy should be unflecked with even the dust of care, their sunlight should be crossed by no cloud of man's gathering. But there was a strength about Kate's character which encouraged her mother to lean upon her. So it came to pass that on the girl's shoulders, even before she attained to womanhood, a burden was laid too heavy for her years. She was weary when life ought to have sat lightly upon her; she longed to be as Ruby was, to have idle hours, without the vision obtruding itself of duties left undone, a neglected nursery or a pale mother sitting over the basket of unmended clothes, the bottom of which was never reached. If she had had no consciousness of right and wrong, if her spirit had been one of those light, airy fabrics which flutter through the world, it would not have mattered, she would have taken life as it came, as many do; but such was not Kate's character. Her reasoning powers, her sensitive appreciation of everything that approached her, were largely developed. She could not throw things on one side, or if she did she suffered for it; neither had she the power to wait patiently. The thought of the ten brothers and sisters to be provided for weighed upon her; in her strong young energy she could not be satisfied to let things glide down the stream of life as her father and mother did; and besides, she hated the idea of these brothers of hers growing up inferior to their fellows, and every day and all day long the thought was upon her, "What can I do to help them?"

This evening, when her fit of weeping was over, she stood at her attic window, overlooking those green Surrey

hills which bounded her horizon, and a great longing came upon her to pass beyond their girth into the world.

"To do something, to be something, to break that cold steel chain of poverty which kept them all so earthy. If only!" she exclaimed, and then she stopped. Her face flushed rosy red, and the thought, whatever it was, remained unexpressed.

## CHAPTER V

### "MY LITTLE GIRL."

THE travellers arrived the very day after their letters had announced their coming, none too soon for those who were watching so impatiently for them.

"Why, surely this cannot be my little girl!" the colonel had exclaimed, as Ruby hung round his neck, so tall and slim, he scarcely needed to bend his head to return the caress.

"Indeed, father, and who else should it be?" she answered, half tearfully.

"Well, I really don't know," he said, smiling. "I dare-say it is all right," and he held her at arm's length, examining her critically, with pride and pleasure, amused at the shy look which came into the beautiful dark eyes.

"Yes," he said at last, "decidedly there is no mistake, it is my daughter Ruby; she is your living image, mother."

"And yours," said Mrs. Melville.

"I suppose so," he answered, "as much as anything so fair can resemble a weather-beaten old soldier."

"Old, father! you are not old at all!" said Ruby indignantly.

"I am glad you think not," he said, "but a man who has knocked about in India for over twenty-five years has not much youth left to boast of, Ruby."

"Oh, but you will come home in three years, father, for good, and then——"

Her father laughed.

"And then you expect me to grow young again! I am afraid not, Ruby; but I shall be very proud of my beautiful daughter, and happy. Age has its pleasures. Eh, mother?"

"Indeed it has," answered Mrs. Melville brightly.

That first day was a very happy one for all three. There was so much to hear, so much to tell.

The lovely May afternoon was drawing to a close. From far and near came wafted the scent of flowers—not garden flowers only, but from the great chestnut-trees just bursting into blossom, the lilacs, the long trailing laburnum, and the white and pink hawthorns.

Oh! how beautiful it seemed, not only to the tired traveller, but to Ruby and her grandmother, as they sat on the lawn together.

"Let us take a turn in the shrubbery, father," exclaimed the former, springing up with all the restlessness of youth, in whom life is so strong, so glad. "Will you come, grannie?"

"No, dear, I think not, I am tired; I will go in. I fancy the air is growing chilly; these May evenings are treacherous." She rose as she spoke, and the colonel took her arm and placed it in his.

"Never mind me, Robert," said the old lady, "go with the child."

"I will do both," he answered; "there is no hurry; wait for me, Ruby."

"Yes, father," and she went flitting over the lawn among the flower-beds, gathering a blossom here, a blossom there, and singing softly in the gladness of her heart.

Mother and son went quietly towards the house. They had always been devoted to each other, and neither the few years of the colonel's wedded life nor his long

absences in India had sufficed to bring the shadow of estrangement between them.

"What a beautiful girl she is! Mother, you did not prepare me—it was hardly fair. I have never seen anything so perfect, except"—he paused, and a cloud came over his face, "her mother," he added, in a low voice.

"And she was so different," answered Mrs. Melville.

"Yes, so different," he repeated dreamily.

As if anxious to change the conversation, Mrs. Melville asked, "By the by, Robert, how did you come across Sir Hubert Pennington?"

"Mere chance," answered the colonel. "I have not seen him for years. He has been up in Peshawur and Lahore with John Nicholson. I hear they have done splendid work up there, and are both considered rising men. We met on board the steamer at Bombay; of course he did not know me, but I recognised him by his likeness to his father, who was, as you know, my very dear friend. He was delighted, and then I found he was not going to his own place, but coming here to Ashbourne, to his old tutor, of whom he speaks most highly. He shrinks from the loneliness of Basset Hall—it was never a pleasant home to him—and he does not seem to have many friends. I am glad of the opportunity of making things pleasant for him here. I suppose he'll be all right at the vicarage?"

"Oh yes, if he does not mind a whole host of children," said Mrs. Melville, smiling.

They had reached the drawing-room, and the colonel settled his mother in her armchair at the window, just as if he had never been away.

"It is nice having you home again, Robert," she said, laying her hand on his. "I hardly anticipated such happiness."

"And why not?" answered the colonel. "I hope you will be here to welcome me when I come home for good."

She shook her head.

"Do you forget I am over seventy?" she said.

"That is nothing; you are good for many a year yet, mother," and he stooped and kissed her.

"When you two have done flirting, please let me know," said Ruby, putting her head in at the window, her eyes twinkling with fun. "I think I am jealous, grannie."

"All right, I'm coming," said her father. He went out to her and took her hand even as when she was a little child, and so they walked together. "I am afraid you are a tyrant, Ruby," he said, shaking his head.

"Oh! not more than is good for grannie. She would be dull if she had it all her own way. I am so glad you have come home, father, if only for her sake; she has longed for you of late, more than I ever knew her do before."

"Has she?" said her father. "I think she is looking wonderfully well and young for her years."

"Oh yes, she is quite well," answered Ruby, "but six years is a long time, you know."

"I am aware of that fact when I look at you," replied the colonel, smiling. "Has your friend Kate altered as much, and why has she not been to see me yet? I feel quite neglected."

"You must not," replied Ruby; "you know there is a guest at the vicarage, and that means extra work for Kate."

They had reached the end of the shrubbery and come to a five-barred, white-painted gate, leading into meadows girt round with thick, well-clipped hedges, whilst great trees cast their shadows on the long grass studded with yellow cowslips and wild-flowers. No hour in the day is more lovely than the one which precedes sunset. A

quiet calm seems to fall upon the earth still quivering with life. The air is full of vague sounds—the chattering of birds ere they go to roost, the buzzing of insects making the most of the last rays of sunshine, and above all the low, patient mooing of the cows waiting for their call home. A scene of peace and plenty, truly a very Canaan, which God had given to His people! At least so it appeared to Colonel Melville as he stood at that five-barred gate with Ruby at his side.

"How peaceful! how lovely!" he exclaimed. But suddenly the stillness was broken by a shout and a whoop!

"The children," exclaimed Ruby. "I wonder whether Katie is with them!"

She had hardly uttered the words when a young man, accompanied by two or three boys, came across the meadows.

"Hullo, Pennington," called out the colonel, opening the gate and advancing to meet him, "how do you find yourself? This is rather different from what we have been accustomed to." Then drawing Ruby forward, he added, "I must introduce you to my daughter. Ruby, this is Lieutenant Sir Hubert Pennington, the vicarage guest."

Now, throughout the voyage home the colonel had habitually spoken of Ruby as "my little girl," so the young man was rather taken aback at being thus suddenly brought face to face with a beautiful young woman; but he recovered himself quickly, and taking off his cap, said, smiling,—

"Can you tell me, Miss Melville, why fathers are deceivers ever? The colonel led me to suppose you were still in short frocks and flowing locks; to say the very least of it, very juvenile—in fact, a little girl."

Ruby laughed.

"I hope I shall always be father's 'little girl,'" she said, shaking hands with Sir Hubert, her face brimming over with fun.

"Where's Katie?" she asked, turning to the Clifford boys.

"Busy," was the short answer.

A look of vexation crossed Ruby's face.

"She's always busy; can she never take a holiday?" she said. "Tell her father is vexed that she has not been round to see him. She must come this evening."

"And you too, Pennington," said the colonel. "My mother will be glad to see you; she knew your father and mother."

"Did she?" said Sir Hubert. "I shall be very happy to make her acquaintance."

"Then we shall expect you without fail," repeated the colonel. "We must go home now, Ruby, or we shall be late for dinner!"

"Mind you bring Kate, or I shall have to fetch her myself," were Ruby's last words to the boys as she turned away with her father.

## CHAPTER VI.

### YOUNG MEN AND MAIDENS.

IT was a glorious summer, long remembered at Ashbourne and in the surrounding neighbourhood. Picnics, garden parties, and all the other joys of country life followed each other in quick succession. Bracewell Hall, the squire's place, was full of sons and daughters, while guests were always coming and going. In fact, the whole countryside seemed alive, for every one was desirous of making much of the Indian officers.

Sir Hubert Pennington was a handsome man, and he was, moreover, known to be a rich one, so the mothers of marriageable daughters made him welcome; and he, accustomed to the rough Indian frontier life, where the presence of a woman was the exception, not the rule, found it all very charming, and yielded without the slightest protest to the most delightful spoiling ever bestowed upon man.

"Now, Sir Hubert, you must take this chair; it is the most comfortable," said Mrs. Bracewell, one hot July afternoon. "What made you think of walking up the hill such a warm day? It really is a pity they have no pony carriage at the vicarage."

"Thanks," said Pennington, sinking into the lounge offered him; "I like the walk up. You see we do so little of that sort of thing in India, it is something to feel one's legs again."

"Well, you must take care not to overdo it," she said, in a motherly fashion. "Lily was saying the other day she was afraid the vicarage was too noisy a place for an invalid."

"Oh! but I am not a real invalid," said Sir Hubert. "I like being at the vicarage very much. The vicar and I are great chums, you know."

"But all those children are a terrible drawback. You must find them troublesome."

"Not in the least; there never were better children in the world, poor little beggars! Miss Kate keeps them in fine order."

"Ah, yes! Kate Clifford is a good girl; it is a pity she is so plain."

"Plain! Is she plain?"

Mrs. Bracewell laughed, and turning to her daughter, who had just entered the room, said,—

"Fancy, Lily, Sir Hubert has not perceived that Kate Clifford is plain."

"Well, mother, I don't find her plain, either; I know it is the fashion to call her so. How d'ye do, Sir Hubert?" and she held out a firm, white hand.

"I am very well, thanks," he replied, "though it is the fashion at Ashbourne to consider me an invalid."

Lily Bracewell was a tall, fair, Saxon girl, the best rider in the county, "hail fellow well met" with every one. She was six-and-twenty, and, to her mother's great distress, still unmarried. The fact did not trouble her; she had buoyant health, enjoyed life, and evinced no particular desire to settle down. But when Sir Hubert appeared on the scene, her mother had casually mentioned that "the hunting was good in Bedfordshire, that he had a fine old estate, and Lily might do worse."

"I'll take the matter into consideration," she answered carelessly.

"Are you thinking of going to your place, Sir Hubert?" asked Mrs. Bracewell.

"No," he answered, "my agent has let the house. I have no intention of going there at present."

"Do you not care for the old place?" said Lily. "Shall you remain in India till you get a liver and other Anglo-Indian disadvantages?"

"I hope not quite so long, but I think every man should stick to his profession. I like the life, and I am especially devoted to my chief, John Nicholson. He is a grand fellow."

Lily looked curiously at Sir Hubert.

"Grand! how is he grand?"

"In every way," answered Hubert with enthusiasm; "he is a king among men. Whole Sikh tribes have succumbed to his power, and they worship him."

"Worship him!" repeated Lily Bracewell with a smile.

"Yes, worship him," said Pennington. "Why should they not? The Greeks worshipped Hercules. There is not a heathen nation but has its gods or demi-gods. It is not the actual man they worship, but the power they recognise in him."

"But I suppose you use the word 'worship' figuratively?" said Mrs. Bracewell; "otherwise, you know, it would be very shocking—indeed, it would be idolatry."

"No, I mean it literally," answered Sir Hubert.

"Then I think your friend must be anything but a hero," said Mrs. Bracewell, "to allow of such wickedness."

"He does not allow it. On the contrary, the delinquents are punished most severely; three dozen strokes of the cat whenever they prostrate themselves before him."

Sir Hubert's eyes twinkled at the astonishment expressed in the faces of his listeners, but the conversation was interrupted by the announcement of Colonel Melville, his daughter, and Miss Clifford.

After the first greetings were over Lily Bracewell said,—

"Colonel, have you ever heard of this wonderful Englishman who allows himself to be worshipped by the Indians?"

"Excuse me, Miss Bracewell, I never said he allowed it," interposed Sir Hubert; "on the contrary, he does his very best to prevent it."

"You are speaking of Nicholson," said Colonel Melville.

"Yes," answered Pennington.

"I have heard it alluded to in a vague way," replied the colonel, "but I never attached much importance to the story. I suppose it is true?"

"Quite true," answered Sir Hubert.

"I believe he is a fine fellow, and the Sikhs are a strange people," said the colonel.

"But what are our missionaries doing to allow of such dreadful things?" said Mrs. Bracewell in a shocked voice.

"I cannot say," said the colonel, laughing; "I am not up in that sort of thing."

Two or three other people dropping in, the conversation took a new direction. Ruby was looking lovely, and was naturally surrounded by admirers; her beauty was so delicate, so fascinating, and her manners so unaffected. It was a well-known fact that Horace Bracewell, the squire's eldest son, was in love with her. Scarcely a day passed but he found his way down to the cottage. Still there was no engagement between them, and some people declared Ruby was a desperate little flirt; the fact was her time had not yet come. So she remained unruffled, a queen of beauty, enjoying her privileges, and not at all inclined to abrogate them. Who shall say she was wrong? She had no cares; why should she take up the burden of life in her spring-time?

From the first hour of their acquaintance, she and Sir

Hubert Pennington had been great friends. He also spent much of his time at Woodland Cottage, and more than once Horace Bracewell felt sharp twinges of jealousy, for from her childhood he had loved Ruby; she had always been to him the loadstar of his life, and she knew it.

She rode to hounds between him and his sister Lily, and it was a rare occurrence if they were not all three in at the death. He was a big fellow, a fine specimen of the Anglo-Saxon race, over six feet, and broad in proportion. He had been to the University and taken an ordinary degree, but he had been reckoned one of the best oars in the 'Varsity boat, and he was a crack batsman in the county eleven. As eldest son, he was his father's right hand, and the young squire was a very popular man. He himself was proud of his race; and though he enjoyed life with the full power of a strong physical nature, his living had been clean and wholesome, and he had nothing to be ashamed of in the past. He was a perfectly contented and perfectly happy man; every day had its round of duties and pleasures, and, as he said, he liked to take things easily. Days and weeks glided by imperceptibly in this quiet country life, and he had watched Ruby grow from the child into the beautiful woman. Seeing her daily, he was content, and argued that there was no reason why he should hurry matters on, or ruffle the even tenor of their life; she was so sweet in her girlish innocence, as much a part and parcel of his world as the flowers in spring or the red autumn leaves of his native woods.

He smiled indulgently when other men came a-courting her, but he never suffered another hand to put her in the saddle, and the first dance, be it at public or private balls, was always his.

There is a wonderful charm in this silent, ever-watchful courtship, and Ruby felt it, without being aware

of the fact. There was always some one to turn to; she never knew what it was to miss those gallant courtesies so dear to a woman's heart, from the flower she wore in her bosom, to the quiet, watchful care which made all things easy to her. A simple life and yet a full one for them both, for the seed of love was sown in their hearts by the great Master's hand, and lacked neither the dews of earth nor heavenly sunshine to bring it to perfection.

But in Ruby's heart it was still in abeyance; she was like a butterfly dancing in the summer sunlight. Sir Hubert Pennington brought a new element into her life; he amused and interested her, and, to Horace Bracewell's discomfiture, she showed it; he therefore made up his mind to settle matters at once.

There was some one else also who was by no means pleased with Ruby—namely, Kate Clifford.

"It is hardly fair," she thought; "she draws every man into her net, and no other girl has a chance. Why cannot she be content with Horace Bracewell?" and she sighed.

But this afternoon Sir Hubert was most discreet, and divided his attention between her and Lily Bracewell, entirely ignoring Ruby. When the colonel, looking at his watch, announced that it was time to return home, Kate was made supremely happy walking between him and Sir Hubert, while Bracewell paired off with Ruby.

"You'll be late for dinner, Horace," observed the squire, as he saw him take up his hat.

"Oh no," he answered, "it is only a step," and he went out.

"Well," said Mr. Bracewell to his wife, rejoining her in the drawing-room, "I think Horace has made up his mind at last to speak openly with Ruby Melville."

"I wish he would," answered Mrs. Bracewell; "she is

such a pretty girl, and so many young fellows are hanging about her."

"Especially Sir Hubert Pennington," said the squire, smiling significantly.

Gaily the homeward-bound party went their way by a narrow pathway under the dark fir-trees which clothed the hillside, and out into the shining valley which lay below, encircled by hills and downs. It was impossible not to be glad on such an evening, the lark rising almost from under their feet soaring higher and higher, its song growing faint as it disappeared amidst the feathery clouds tossed in careless beauty on the pale blue sky.

"Ruby," said Horace, as they walked on somewhat in advance of the others, "I want to say something to you."

"You do not generally ask my permission to do that," she answered.

"Perhaps not," he replied, "but then this is something special. I need not tell you that I love you, Ruby, for you have always known it, but I want you to promise to be my wife before your father goes back to India."

"And spoil his holiday and leave grannie alone?" she said, speaking in a low voice. "No, Horace, I will not do that. My life has fallen in pleasant places; I have no duties like Kate Clifford has, but still I have a few—grannie and father—and until father comes home and settles I will not think of marrying. I am glad you have spoken, for of course I knew it must come one day, and that you would expect a different answer."

"Do you really mean, Ruby, that you will keep me waiting three or four years?" said Horace.

"I do not ask you to wait," she answered, though her voice trembled slightly, "only I will not marry now; you are quite free," and having said that she stepped quickly forward, but he caught her up.

"Has Sir Hubert anything to do with this answer?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever," she replied. "We do like each other very much, but I am not in love with him, and I am sure he is not with me. There is no one else, Horace, whom I care for. Cannot you understand the old people want me? I must stay by them. Leave well alone—we are very happy as we are—for the present. Now go home, or you will be, as your father said, late for dinner," and she stood still, waiting for the others to come up.

So Horace had his answer, but he was by no means crestfallen.

"She may change her mind," he thought; "we are both young."

He bade them good-evening, and no one guessed what had taken place. They all parted company at the vicarage gate, and as Kate and Sir Hubert crossed the lawn together the latter said,—

"Much as I am enamoured with my Indian life I must say a summer in England is enchanting. It is like a douche, and refreshes the whole man."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Kate. "I can make no comparisons with other countries. I have never been beyond my own Surrey hills, and am never likely to go much farther."

"Who can tell? One never knows," said Sir Hubert.

She shook her head and went quickly forward to meet her mother, who stood in the porch with the youngest child in her arms. As Kate took the little one from her, she said,—

"Are you tired, mother? have I been gone too long?"

"No, dear; I hope you have enjoyed yourself," said Mrs. Clifford, entering the house with her.

"Not a very cheerful prospect for the girl," thought Sir Hubert, as he ran up to his own room to dress.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIRST SORROW.

THE following morning Sir Hubert strolled after breakfast round the vicarage garden, and finally settled himself in the summer-house, where he was lazily smoking his pipe when he saw the vicar coming hurriedly across the lawn, calling out in an agitated voice,—

"Pennington, where are you?"

"Here, sir," he said, rising, and coming out of the arbour. "Has anything happened?"

"The saddest thing imaginable has happened," said the vicar. "My dear old friend Mrs. Melville was found dead in her bed this morning."

"Dead!" exclaimed Hubert, "surely not!"

"It is only too true," said the vicar. "I have just come from Woodlands, and Kate is still there with Ruby. The colonel sent for us. Her maid found Mrs. Melville this morning lying as if asleep; indeed, she thought she was sleeping, and not to disturb her left the room without even drawing up the blinds; returning half an hour later and finding her mistress had not moved, she went to the bedside, and at a glance saw what had happened. She must have passed away in her sleep without a struggle."

"A peaceful end for her, but a terrible shock for the colonel and his daughter," said Sir Hubert.

"It is indeed," answered the vicar. "It is the child's first sorrow—her grandmother has been all in all to her;

we have had the greatest difficulty in getting her to leave the room. She would not believe she was gone; and when the doctor assured her that life was extinct, she fainted in Kate's arms."

Sir Hubert did not speak; he could think only of the sorrow which had fallen upon that happy home, and upon that sweet, young life.

"I must go back to the colonel," said the vicar. "I only left him to tell you and my wife what has happened. He is feeling it very deeply; they were so attached to each other."

"If I can be of any use——" said Sir Hubert.

"Thank you, I will let you know," answered the vicar, and he left him.

Very sad and dreary were the days which followed. All the country round grieved for Mrs. Melville. Her personal beauty, her graciousness, her large hospitality, and her ready charity had endeared her to rich and poor alike; and when they laid her to rest in the village churchyard, many came from afar to show their respect and love. All that sympathy and kindness could avail for the living was lavished upon the colonel and Ruby, but she was heart-broken. "Grannie, my own dear grannie," was for ever on her lips, and she turned her face to the wall, refusing to be comforted. As the vicar had said, it was her first grief, and the strength of it was proportionate to her untried youth.

"You must take her away," the doctor said to the colonel, a few days after the funeral, "or we shall have her seriously ill."

So it was settled they should leave Woodlands and go for a time to St. Leonards. Most unwillingly Ruby assented; indeed, it was only when the colonel said reproachfully,—

"Ruby, do you forget that I am suffering also, have you no love for your father?" that she awoke to the con-

sciousness that she was not alone, and throwing her arms round his neck, she sobbed,—

"Oh! forgive me, father."

"My little girl must remember she is all the world to me," said the colonel, caressing her.

A few days later the mail brought the colonel a letter from headquarters, expressing regret at being obliged to curtail his furlough, but owing to several deaths among the officers and other circumstances, the general commanding at Delhi found himself necessitated to desire Colonel Melville to make it convenient to rejoin his regiment as soon as possible.

He received this unpleasant order a few days before the time fixed for their going to St. Leonards, and he was thoroughly at a loss how to break the news to Ruby.

The idea of taking her with him never crossed his mind; he had always determined she should not go to India, but to leave her alone at Woodlands was impossible.

"I shall have to ask the vicar to take charge of her," he was thinking, just as Ruby entered the study to make some arrangements about the house during their absence.

In an instant she saw that her father was annoyed, and the official-looking letter on the table told its own tale.

"Something wrong, father dear?" she asked.

He looked at her hesitatingly. Her black dress, her beautiful face, pale with recent sorrow, so like his mother's, made his heart sore at the thought of leaving her. She was his only tie, the one thing that bound him to the world; it did seem hard. His silence alarmed Ruby.

"Father, what is it?" she asked anxiously.

"My darling," he answered, putting his arm round her and drawing her to him, "I have received orders to join my regiment in India as soon as possible."

"Well," said Ruby quietly, "of course we must go."

Then a startled, almost frightened look came into her face. "Surely you were not thinking of leaving me behind?"

"I hoped never to have taken you out there, my child. I cannot see how I am to. My duties would oblige me to leave you often alone, and you are very young."

"But other girls go out, father. We have only our two selves now, and we cannot be parted; where you go I must go."

"Then I must make arrangements," said the colonel, drawing her into his arms. "I am afraid it is very weak of me to yield against my better judgment, but, as you say, we have only our two selves to consider, and it is hard to part." He stroked her hair as she nestled up to him.

"Thank you, father," she answered; "it is not weak at all," and she smiled at him, though her eyes were still dim with tears.

"But do you know, Ruby, I shall have to find a chaperone for you, and there are many other difficulties to be surmounted?"

"Then you will surmount them, father," said Ruby, all her energy returning, and even a faint colour tinging her cheek.

"I suppose I shall if you wish it," he said, kissing her. "Indeed, I do not feel I *could* leave you; at the last moment I should carry you away with me. But you must have a companion. Where am I to find one in so short a time?"

Ruby thought for a few moments, then she said,—

"Father, why should not Kate Clifford go with me?"

"My dear child, she is almost as young as you are."

"I know," said Ruby, "but for a year at least I shall not be going into society"—and she looked at her black gown—"therefore it would be dull for me to have an old lady to keep me company. I am very fond of Kate, we

have been brought up so much together, it would not be like having a stranger, and of course Jane, my old nurse, will go with me. I think for the present that would be quite enough. I should like to have Kate with me; I could not bear any one else."

"But what do you think Kate's father and mother will say to this arrangement?" said the colonel. "She is their right hand."

Ruby hesitated for a moment, then she said,—

"But, father, they want money so badly for the children; if you could make it worth their while to let Kate go, I think they would do it."

"What a wise little woman she is," said the colonel, smiling. "Well, I suppose I am under orders and bound to obey. I'll see what can be done."

The father and daughter were a very handsome couple. People wondered how it was the colonel had escaped matrimony for so long. More than one woman had made a dead set at him, but he had passed quietly on his way without ever seeming to notice it. He was one of those rare men who, having loved once, never so much as dream of the possibility of replacing that first and only love. Now Ruby was grown up, and he had a companion, he was satisfied.

A few days after the above conversation Kate came over, as she now did every day, to the cottage. She found Ruby sitting in her pretty morning-room, her hands resting idly in her lap, and a wistful look on her young face.

"I am so glad you have come, Katie," she said. "Any news?" she added, as she caught the peculiar look on Kate's face.

"You know, you must know," answered Kate, kneeling down beside her, and throwing her arms round her. "Oh, Ruby," and she burst into tears.

"So they have told you," said Ruby quietly. "What have you decided, Kate?"

"Nothing," she answered. "How can I go, how can I leave them all?"

"Dear, I have thought a great deal about it," said Ruby; "you have not had time to do so yet, and I have come to the conclusion that it is the best thing for you and for them. I am sure my father will be generous. A first-rate governess will really supply your place more effectually with the children. You are always being called away, you have a hundred and one things to do; she will have her work cut out for her, nothing will interfere with her duties. Willie can try for Sandhurst. I know my father means to push him. You will have the chance you have so longed for to see something of the world. Besides, I want my friend Kate; I am so lonely," and tears filled her eyes.

"I know," said Kate, kissing her; "we have grown up together. But what of my mother?"

"Mary is nearly twelve years old," said Ruby, "and she is very bright; besides, Mrs. Clifford can have more help. What does your father say about it?"

"At first neither of them would hear of it, but Colonel Melville asked them to take a week to consider. He is so very generous, Ruby, and money is such a consideration with us."

"And you are invaluable to your mother; at the same time, no one can be to me what you can, Kate. My father knows this; and we both feel, if *your* father and mother consent, and you are willing to come, that we can never do enough to fill the vacancy you will leave behind."

"You do not suppose for one moment that I do not wish to go," said Kate. "It is just because I think it so delightful that I cannot make up my mind that it

is right for me to leave all my burdens and all my duties behind for another to pick up."

"Well, we will hear what the parents decide," replied Ruby; "until then we will try not to think too much about it."

At the breakfast-table a week later the colonel handed a note to Ruby.

"I have just received this from the vicar. I think you will be pleased, darling."

"Indeed, I am, father," she answered, as she scanned the letter, which was short and to the purpose.

"DEAR COLONEL MELVILLE,—After mature consideration, we have decided to accept your offer to take Kate to India as Ruby's companion. For her it will be an undoubted benefit, and except for the loss of our dear child, your generosity makes it equally so for us. Of course her mother is anxious and tearful, but she is willing to believe it is both for Kate's good and our own, and so consents to the personal sacrifice which parting from a child must necessarily entail. Once more thanking you for the kind manner in which you have taken upon yourself to ease my burdens, believe me, dear colonel,

"Yours sincerely,

"WALTER CLIFFORD."

"It is good of him, very good indeed!" said Ruby. "I must go over directly after breakfast and thank him."

"Very well," said her father. "After that we will talk matters over. You had better bring Kate back with you. We must start in three weeks' time. You will need outfits. I will take you both up to town next week with Jane for two or three days. I suppose you will know what to get?"

"I am not at all sure that we shall," said Ruby. "I think it would be much better if you asked Mrs. Clifford

to go with us. It is ages since she left home, and it would do her a world of good."

"Very well; I think the idea a sensible one. I will walk over to the vicarage and speak to her at once; there is no time to lose."

It was the fact of there being no time to lose which really roused Ruby. She could not sit down and mourn; though her recent sorrow was ever present with her, she had to throw it off and be up and doing.

Mrs. Clifford declared at first she could not possibly leave home, but her husband and Sir Hubert overruled her, and as there would be no one to look after at Woodlands, Ruby proposed that Parkins should take charge at the vicarage. She had been housekeeper to Mrs. Melville for more than ten years, and was thoroughly to be trusted.

Certainly a week's shopping in London with unlimited money and no cares was a sore temptation to Mrs. Clifford, and so she yielded; when she returned, the vicar declared she looked ten years younger and happier.

"How good and generous the colonel has been I can never tell you, Walter," she said to her husband. "He has insisted upon Kate's having precisely the same outfit as Ruby, except just the deep mourning, and he has made me such handsome presents, I hardly liked accepting them; but he kept saying he was indebted to us for giving Kate up, and therefore I must let him do as he pleased."

"He certainly is most generous," answered the vicar, "and he has promised to use all his influence for Willie. The lad is so happy."

The news of the colonel's recall to India, and his decision with regard to Ruby and Kate, were, of course, soon known all over the county. Every one agreed

that he could not leave Ruby behind, and that it was a splendid thing for Kate. Horace Bracewell was in despair; that he could wait for Ruby, seeing her every day, was possible, but to have her thus carried away out of sight or ken was quite another matter. He ventured a few words to her, but she cut him short, saying decidedly,—

"Please don't, Horace; I care for no one but my father at the present moment; he is my all in all."

And so he was silenced.

The days flew rapidly by—too rapidly, for there were so many people to see, so many farewells to be taken. The whole Bracewell family were beyond measure grieved.

"Horace has lost her," the squire said emphatically to his wife. "It is not likely such a pretty girl will remain unmarried out in India; why, the ugliest have a chance there, I hear."

"I suppose so," said his wife dejectedly; "he has been very foolish."

Then she comforted herself with the reflection that Sir Hubert Pennington had still six months' leave to run, and with Ruby and Kate both out of the way Lily's chances were decidedly good.

* * * * *

The day for parting came at last. All tried to be brave, and all signally failed.

"Grannie, dear grannie!" murmured Ruby, as for the last time she crossed the threshold of her happy home. "Take care of everything until we come home again, Parkins," she said, wringing the old housekeeper's hand.

"Now, Ruby, quick, my child!" said the colonel, anxious to shorten the leave-takings; he helped her into the carriage, and they drove away. So the first chapter of Ruby Melville's life came to an end.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STRANDED.

AT first things did not go on at the vicarage quite as smoothly as could have been desired. The mother was tearful; the children were noisy and fretful.

"It is so strange," said Mrs. Clifford, "Kate had a knack of managing them. I suppose we shall settle down in time, when the new governess comes," and she sighed.

"Oh yes, we shall get on," said Pennington cheerfully; but in his heart he felt rather doubtful, and inclined to blame Kate for forsaking her post.

He felt still more bitter against the new state of things when he wandered out the following afternoon, and, more from habit than anything else, found himself in the gardens of Woodland Cottage. Parkins and the head gardener were to keep the place in order. "So we shall find our nest ready for us when we come home, Ruby," the colonel had said. "You will like to think the place is cared for, dear?" "Indeed I shall, father," she had answered; "grannie was so fond of it, and I have had such a happy childhood here."

So it was settled, and the vicarage was to be supplied liberally with vegetables, fruits, and flowers, while the gardener was to be at liberty to dispose of the surplus.

"Why on earth did I come here?" exclaimed Sir Hubert aloud, as he turned his back in disgust on the

deserted home, when lo! and behold! he saw coming in at the wicket-gate no less a person than Horace Bracewell. They both looked at each other and scowled; then the absurdity of the position struck them, and they burst out laughing.

"It's no use," said Sir Hubert; "the bird has flown, the nest is empty."

"As if we did not know it," answered Horace; "it is horribly stupid, but somehow a fellow——" he stopped short.

"It was such a pleasant place," said Sir Hubert; "but it is hard lines on you, Bracewell."

"Rather," said Horace shortly.

Then they parted company, Horace mounting his horse which he had given to a lad to hold, and Sir Hubert strolling back to the vicarage with the sort of feeling that there was nothing to do. Somehow, a bond of sympathy had arisen between the two men; the change which had come over the face of all things affected them both. There was not a day in the past that Horace Bracewell had not known he might chance to come across Ruby Melville. As a schoolboy, a young man from college, he had watched for her in the sunny lanes and across the meadows, and now it was suddenly all gone, he positively hated the place.

It was the end of October; the shooting at Bracewell Park was very noted, and, if anything, it was better than usual this season; but as he tramped over the fields the man's heart was sore within him, he took no delight in the freshness of the autumn mornings, cared little whether he brought home a full bag or an empty one; and to the surprise of his people, for he was a first-rate shot, it was more often the latter case than the former.

He was morose; leaving the guests at the Hall to the

care of his father and brother, he went off by himself into the woods, his gun on his shoulder, his dogs at his heels. In these solitary wanderings he more than once came across Sir Hubert Pennington, and the two would tramp on together, not often speaking, but with a sort of fellow-feeling of discomfort and discontent.

For Sir Hubert the vicarage had lost its charm. The vicar and Mrs. Clifford laid themselves out to make his stay agreeable, but it was no longer the same thing; Kate had never seemed to lay herself out, and yet he had always found everything to his hand, and there was always some one to talk to. And then, Woodlands was empty! the old lady with her quick wit and ever-ready welcome had passed away, and the sunshine of Ruby's presence had gone also. Yes, they both felt the sunshine had gone.

"I am thinking of going down to Bedfordshire next week," said Sir Hubert, as, after a long day's shooting, they returned through the Bracewell woods. "My agent has written that the house is empty. I suppose you would not care to come with me?"

"Oh yes, I should," answered Bracewell. "I should be glad of any excuse to get out of this place."

"Well, if you do not mind roughing it a bit, I shall be glad of your company," said Sir Hubert; "but I have no establishment, only my grandfather's old housekeeper, and the gardener and his wife."

"Oh! that will make no odds," said Horace; "in fact, I should like it all the better."

So it was settled, and as they parted company Sir Hubert thought,—

"That fellow is hard hit! He has known the girl all his life. I wonder why he waited so long."

His life had been such a different one from Horace Bracewell's. Every day of the week in his active career had its

incident, its mark; he could not understand the easy-going ways of a quiet English home-life.

It was a misty November morning through which the sun was struggling bravely when Sir Hubert and Horace sat at breakfast in the morning-room of Basset Hall. A great fire blazed on the hearth, and the surroundings were decidedly luxurious, which somewhat belied Sir Hubert's prognostication of "roughing it." Both men had newspapers and letters beside them, which, in the intervals of eating, they were scanning.

"I really do think," exclaimed Pennington, "that Nicholson is one of the finest men in the service, and we have fine men, there is no doubt—Chamberlain and Edwards among the first, not to speak of our chiefs the Lawrences. Nicholson is pressing me to get back to India at once; he says he is certain we shall soon have work on our hands. I suppose by that he means a continuation of this Persian War. Then the Oude business is most unsatisfactory; we always knew it would be if Coverley Jackson were made chief commissioner of Oude during Outram's absence on sick leave. I believe he has behaved disgracefully as regards the old king. Vile things have been done; we are accused of being little better than thieves and robbers. This, of course, must be put a stop to, or we shall lose all credit with the natives, and the results may be very disastrous. I am almost inclined to do as Nicholson wishes and go back. You see, I am not like other men, I have no family, and few inducements to remain at home. I am not really ill, and these last six months have set me up altogether."

Horace looked at him across the table, and flushing up to his eyebrows, said,—

"And there are attractions over there?"

"Not the one you imagine," answered Sir Hubert,

looking at him steadily. "The colonel will be in the neighbourhood of Delhi, and I shall join Nicholson in the Peshawur. No, Bracewell, I will throw my cards down for you to see. I think Ruby Melville simply charming, and I am surprised myself that I have not fallen in love with her; she is enough to turn the head of any man just home from where ladies are scarce, but my head and my heart are sound. I can't understand it myself—she is very fascinating, and yet I have no desire to make her my wife; and I am sure, though she likes me, she has no warmer feeling for me."

"I am awfully glad to hear this," said Horace, "for I love her very dearly, and cannot imagine how I am to drag on life for three years without a sight of her."

"Why should you?" said Pennington, laughing. "The game is excellent in India—lion and leopard hunting; suppose you give it a trial?"

Horace was silent; the thing seemed so simple, and yet it had never struck him as possible. He had gone through the ordinary routine of a young English squire's life, and had never thought of diverging from the beaten track; indeed, as long as Ruby had been within reach, there was no reason for his doing so, but now, in a second, his mind was made up.

"When you go, I will go with you," he said. "I am a free man, and may as well take a trip to India as go anywhere else. One thing is certain, I cannot stay here."

"Become a globe-trotter," said Sir Hubert, laughing. "What will your people say?"

"Oh, they may *think* what they like, but they will *say* nothing to me. Ruby is a great favourite with the governor, and I know he was awfully cut up at her going off without anything being settled between us."

"Well," said Pennington, "I don't suppose I shall leave this side of Christmas."

"Why not?" answered Horace. "The sooner the better. If we decide to go, why not go at once?"

"Decidedly you are far gone," said Sir Hubert, laughing. "There is the dog-cart to take us to Lord Lufton's; we must be off. We will talk this business over when we get back this evening."

They went for their day's shooting, and then sat up late over the fire, discussing their plans. The result was they agreed to start for India together in a month from that date.

The Bracewells were doubtless surprised, but no remark was made publicly.

"It is the best thing he can do," said the old squire in private to his wife; "faint heart never won fair lady."

Sir Hubert took care the vicarage should not be any the poorer by his sudden whim; indeed, it was rather otherwise.

"I came for a year, and I upset your whole household; if I choose to break my engagement, that is my business, and you must let me settle it my own way."

And he made out his cheque accordingly.

## CHAPTER IX.

### EXPERIENCES.

"HERE we are at last! I am sure, girls, you must be dreadfully tired," said Colonel Melville, as the palki * stopped before the dăk bungalow at the end of their first day's journey on the road to Delhi. They had had a good voyage out, and had reached Calcutta towards the middle of December. There the colonel had found an official communication requesting him to push on as quickly as possible, as his presence was needed at head-quarters.

Unfortunately, the rainy season was barely over, and in those days before the Mutiny there were none of the great bridges which now span the large rivers, there were no railways except the one original line near Calcutta. The rivers had therefore to be crossed by means of ferry-boats, or by bridges made of boats chained together, and it would often happen that the force of the current after the rains would carry them far down the stream.

To Ruby and Kate the whole thing so far was perfectly delightful; but, being a long journey, they at last grew tired of the close, stuffy palki, and were glad when they reached the dăk bungalow, a sort of Government hotel, which is now among the things of the past.

When the horn was heard announcing the arrival of a dăk gari,† the khansamah appeared at the door of the

* Native carriage. † Government carriage.

bungalow, making a profound salaam, his hands folded together most obsequiously.

"What have you got to give us to eat?" was the colonel's first question.

"Everything, my lord."

"Have you got a beefsteak?"

"No, your honour, there is no beefsteak."

"Mutton chops, then?"

"Where can your slave get mutton chops?" was the reproachful answer.

"What is there then?"

"There are plenty of fowls."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then, give us your everlasting chicken and rice. Rao," he continued, addressing his own khansamah, "you will have to supplement out of the baskets."

The furniture of these bungalows was by no means luxurious, consisting of one or more camp tables and a few camp dining-room chairs; but Ruby and Kate were thankful for the sight of the bheesti (water-carrier) with his water-skin, out of which he filled the ghurrahs; then the khansamah provided them with hot water, and they were able to wash off the dust and fatigue of the journey.

Though the table-cloth was very crumpled, and the plate badly cleaned, they managed, nevertheless, to enjoy the meal. They were so young and full of life, the little inconveniences which might have tried older people were as nothing to them, they did not feel them; and they managed to sleep soundly on the charpoys—a sort of couch with no bedding but what they themselves provided.

They stood on the verandah the following morning, and were highly amused watching the process of harnessing a pair of half-broken and half-fed ponies into the gari; when this had been accomplished they took their seats.

Thereupon ensued much kicking and squealing until at last the conveyance was put into motion and disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust.

The appearance of the country through which they passed was almost everywhere the same. In the summer the land gives one the impression of baked mud, broken by the green "tosses"* of trees, with the herds of lean cattle feeding on a plain where scarcely a tinge of vegetation is visible. But the grass is really better than it looks—poor as regards blade, but rich in succulent surface roots; it is called "doob," and every one who keeps a horse keeps also a grass-cutter, whose business it is to grub up a load every day for the animal under his care. At this time of the year the country was less dried up; it was not the hot season.

Sometimes they would come across strings of little weedy country ponies or "tattoos" laden with bundles of doob; but what amused them most was when they passed through the villages with their mud huts, squalid and untidy in the extreme, for then the whole story of Eastern life unrolled itself to their eyes and minds—the potter turning out the village crockery with the primitive band wheel, the earthen pipkins and the water-jars; "two women grinding at the mill," preparing the flour for the evening meal of "chuppatees"; whilst another kneaded the cakes; little naked children played in the dust-heaps, and the village herd of mangy, noisy curs, half watch-dogs, half scavengers, barked and yelped as the dăk gari and the wild ponies drove on. At length a stream of water came in sight, and as there was no bridge of boats, carriage and horses had to be put into the big heavy, primitive ferry-boat, which was hauled a long way up stream and then punted across.

* Groves.

Once as they neared the bank a group of vultures attracted their attention, as also several lean, mangy curs fighting over something; upon inspection it turned out to be the carcass of a half-cremated Hindoo, which had been carried inland by the stream. Many other sights and scenes interested them, and made the days and nights pass quickly until they reached Delhi, and found themselves in the colonel's bungalow in the Sabzimandi.

It was a large, handsome bungalow, wonderfully picturesque with its thatched roof and great group of palm-trees on one side. In front was a fine portico, and the verandah round the other sides was broad and roomy. The lawn in front was kept green by artificial irrigation and surrounded by flower-beds, in which the brilliant pointsettia and various kinds of hibiscus plants were prominent. Arches of trellised bamboo covered with creepers added not a little to the brightness, whilst bushes of oleander and other tropical flowering shrubs were scattered here and there. The mali, a lean Hindoo very scantily clad and with primitive notions of horticulture, wandered to and fro, or took his ease in a hut hidden away in a corner. Several turbanned chuprassies (messengers) squatted behind the pillars on the verandah, and under the shade of the trees mounted chuprassies stood beside their steeds, horses or camels, in readiness if their master needed them. The military camel sowar was a very picturesque object in his coloured turban and girdle, the latter ornamented with a brass plate, his badge of office, and the camel attired in his saddle and trappings of red cloth, with a string of small bells round his neck jingling musically. The colonel's high position in the army necessitated the continual attendance of these Government messengers.

The bungalow itself was a one-storied dwelling; instead

of windows, glazed doors opened out from the rooms on to the verandah, and these rooms again communicated with each other, and thus a thorough draught was established throughout the house.

Ruby and Kate were enchanted with everything. The drawing-room was a large and lofty room, and here after the first few days they expended all their art in making it seem as much like home as possible. Pictures, books, and nicknacks, around which pleasant memories lingered, soon covered the walls and tables; a piano also arrived from Delhi, and a profusion of bright flowers and plants transformed it into a perfect bower.

"Father, I cannot think why you did not want me to come to India," said Ruby one morning as the two girls, just returned from their early ride, stood on the verandah in their habits. "I think it is the most lovely place, and the life is simply perfect."

Her father laughed.

"Perhaps I thought it might be too charming, and as my time is nearly up I was not anxious to initiate you," he answered.

"Ah! of course it would be different if you were not here; after all, it is not my home," she said, laying her hand caressingly on his arm.

"I am afraid we shall become very luxurious," said Kate, with a sigh.

She might well say so, for it was verily a scene of luxury and comfort in the midst of which they stood. On the verandah a table was spread with an ample supply of cups and saucers, showing that any number of visitors might be expected to chota hazree (little breakfast), which meal consisted of tea, toast, and fruit. In a corner the khitnutgar* was fanning the fire in a small, portable

* Native servant.

charcoal stove for the purpose of making the kettle boil. Another attendant was milking a white goat at the foot of the verandah to make sure the milk was fresh and pure. A third whisked away the flies from the table and expelled the saucy sparrows and striped squirrels who were boldly claiming their share of the meal. On this especial morning no one broke in on the home circle, which was unusual, and they sat long over it, until the colonel was called away and disappeared into his study.

Kate and Ruby went to their own rooms, where the ayahs had prepared for them the baths and their toilettes for the day.

The entire change had done Ruby much good. It was not that she forgot "dear grannie" and Woodland Cottage, but life was made so pleasant to her she could not help being happy.

So the days and weeks sped by until the end of February, when the heat began to be felt. By this time they were both perfectly at home in their new life. They did not care to indulge in the siesta, which to many women in India becomes such a necessity, but they would read and work together in the pretty drawing-room, in their soft white gowns, resting in the comfortable wicker lounges, sometimes talking, often silent, listening to the sounds from the outer world, which, as the doors to windward are merely shut in by screens of fragrant khus-grass, reached them in their cool retreat.

So many different sounds: the cawing of the crows, the chattering of the minas (starlings), possibly the gurgling of the camel, remonstrating at being forced to fold his long limbs under him in order that his rider might mount; from the garden came the rattle of the wheel as the rope rapidly uncoiled and the empty bucket dipped into the well, while the voice of the mali was heard urging the

patient bullock up the slope, and when the full leathern bag reached the surface the fact was announced by the splash of water, which, running along stone channels into the garden, kept the flowers, trees, and vegetables alive. In the verandah the punkah coolies patiently pulled the big fans suspended from the ceiling, and the tallies, as the grass screens are called, were kept cool by being constantly wetted, so that the air came to them sweet and fragrant, though the sun's rays beat pitilessly on the naked earth and the breeze was absolutely hot.

It was on such an afternoon that these usual sounds were broken in upon by the clatter of horses' hoofs in the compound and by the voices of visitors inquiring for Colonel Melville. Then they heard the obsequious khansamah assuring the new arrivals that the Colonel Sahib had not yet returned from headquarters, and that the young Missy Sahibs were resting.

"I told you so, my dear fellow; you have nearly killed yourself, me, and the horses by your impatience. I told you no one would be visible between tiffin and teatime at five o'clock, and it is now barely three."

"Oh, confound your tiffin!" said another voice irritably. "Tell that idiot of a fellow who is bowing and scraping there to take the horses; we can sit in the verandah until the prescribed hour, I suppose."

In the drawing-room the two girls had simultaneously risen from their lounges, and stood listening, their faces expressive of astonishment and doubt. "If I did not know it to be perfectly impossible," said Ruby, in a low tone, "I should say the voices are those of Horace Bracewell and Sir Hubert Pennington."

"Impossible! why impossible? I am sure they are," said Kate. Then they both stepped out on to the verandah. In a second Horace was beside Ruby.

"My dearest," he whispered, clasping her hand.

"Oh, Horace, why are you here? what has brought you?" said the girl eagerly.

"What the French call *ennui*, Miss Melville," answered Sir Hubert, who in the meantime had greeted Kate; "we both found Ashbourne intolerably dull after you left, and as Captain Nicholson wrote to me, advising me to return as quickly as possible, because he did not like the look of things out here, Bracewell thought he might just as well take the trip also, and hunt in Asia instead of in Europe; there is a great deal in novelty."

Ruby blushed rosy red, but she only answered, "It is very pleasant to see home faces; come indoors, it is too hot out here," and she led the way into the darkened drawing-room.

The khansamah hastened to bring ices and cool drinks; and when the colonel, returning an hour later, and hearing voices, entered the drawing-room, he found the old quartette talking and laughing just as they were wont to do in the summer afternoons in the pretty hall at Woodlands.

He was and he was not surprised to see Horace Bracewell; he had guessed pretty well the state of affairs, and now he wondered how Ruby would act towards a man who had come some thousands of miles across land and sea to win her. There was a touch of romance and of old-world chivalry in the act which pleased the colonel. He liked Horace; and though he was anxious to keep Ruby with him, he desired nothing better than to see her the wife of an English squire, instead of wedding an Indian officer and being liable to all manner of vicissitudes.

"Bracewell will keep others away," he thought diplomatically.

Ruby's mourning had so far prevented her going into

society, but still the fact that two girls fresh from England had arrived naturally created considerable excitement in the cantonment. Visitors flocked round them, and ladies offered their services to initiate the new-comers into the ways and customs of Indian life.

"Don't listen to any of them," the colonel had said, when Ruby appealed to him with a puzzled air on some point of etiquette. "I will see you do not go far wrong; I do not want any woman hanging about the bungalow. Remember you are mistress, Ruby, and you must assert yourself, or else you will be getting me carried off, and where would you be then?"

He laughed good-naturedly, and the girls laughed too, entering into the fun.

"Yes, father, I must take care of you. I saw Miss Cannon making a dead set at you yesterday," said Ruby.

"Just so," answered the colonel, "you really must take care of me. When I was a lone man I could secure a degree of privacy; but now they swarm, absolutely swarm, all over the place, and you two girls are the excuse. It is rough on a man! Then there are boys always hanging about. I wish you would stop it."

"Oh! do you mean little Griffiths and Clayton, father? Now, really they are most harmless, poor little boys!" exclaimed Ruby; and Kate put in with a merry laugh,—

"They are just so homesick, sir, that it is all they can do to keep from crying. They are nothing but school-boys; look at their rosy cheeks and shy ways. I have a fellow-feeling for them. I seem to see our own Willie when first he gets cast adrift."

"Well, take care of yourselves, but *especially* of me," the colonel said, with a twinkle in his eye. But the subject was always cropping up in some shape or other, and so that evening he watched with particular satisfaction the

general discomfiture when the two girls appeared in the Company's Gardens to hear the military band, accompanied by Horace Bracewell and Sir Hubert Pennington. Ruby, of course, was an acknowledged beauty, but Kate also had her admirers. Her clear, English complexion, deep-grey eyes and nut-brown hair by no means passed unnoticed.

Sir Hubert was well known in the official world, but Horace Bracewell's sudden appearance created a sensation amongst the male and female population.

"Of course he has come after one or other of the girls," was the general verdict.

The men pronounced him a fool for his pains.

"They have not been out here two months," grumbled little Griffiths. "He should have made his mind up sooner and not have let her come out at all; but once here, he might at least let other fellows have a chance. It's deuced mean, I call it."

If the truth must be told, there were many others of the same opinion.

But the colonel was radiant, and looked at the young subalterns hovering in the rear with a "hands off" expression, which was highly irritating to them.

## CHAPTER X.

### A PATIENT SUITOR.

"IT is too bad of you, Ruby; the poor man is looking absolutely wretched; here he has been travelling three months to see you, and you avoid him at every turn," said Kate, one afternoon when they happened to be alone.

"Of course I do, and I mean to," answered Ruby; but she kept her back turned to Kate, so that her friend did not see that the brown eyes were full of tears and the lips trembling.

"Do you really care for Horace Bracewell, Ruby, or do you not?" said Kate gently. "I never can guess what you feel; you are just the same to every one."

"It does not in the least matter what I may or may not feel," answered Ruby. "I do not intend to marry—at least for some years; I mean to remain with my father. I cannot help the men coming buzzing round me; I do not encourage them, though I should be sorry if they did not come, because it would be dull; but I will not marry nor be engaged to any of them, no more to Horace Bracewell than to Baby Griffiths. So leave me alone, Katie," and she stamped her little foot and burst out laughing, a laugh which was not far removed from tears.

After a few minutes' silence, Kate said firmly, "Ruby, you should tell Horace; he is so miserable, and he cannot be allowed to go on hanging about in that forlorn way."

"I made it quite clear to him before I left home," said Ruby; "he ought not to have come out here. This once I will do as you advise, but remember, Kate, it is the last time; both he and the other moths must take care of themselves in future: if they choose to singe their wings, it will be their fault, not mine."

Having given utterance to these sentiments in an impatient, petulant voice, she threw herself on her couch and buried her face in the soft, silken cushions; and so Kate thought it best to leave her. She knew Ruby had her moods, and beyond a certain point would not brook control, so she went to her own room and dropped the heavy curtain between them.

Ruby opened her eyes and turned on her pillow; then finding herself alone, she began to cry softly; and as if unwilling to acknowledge the weakness even to herself, she would not let the tears fall, but kept brushing them away with the back of her hand as fast as they gathered on the long, silky lashes. It was a trick of childhood which she had never broken herself of.

"It is hard, very hard, indeed," she said. "I wish he had never come."

Again she buried her face in the pillow, till nothing but the wavy, soft brown hair resting on the pure white brow was visible, and so she fell asleep.

That evening after dinner the chairs were put outside the verandah; it was brilliant moon and starlight; the great heats had not yet come, when the nights are as hot as the days, and the artificially cooled houses are kept hermetically closed until just before sunrise, then all doors are thrown open, and the tepid air is allowed to circulate through the house, to the great relief of the inhabitants.

Apparently by accident, but probably because she had so willed it, Ruby and Horace were seated a little apart

from the numerous dinner guests, who, standing and sitting in groups, laughed and talked merrily.

"Do you know," said Horace, "that Pennington continues his journey to join his regiment stationed at Lahore the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, I heard him telling my father; are you thinking of going with him?"

Horace hesitated for a moment, then he said,—

"That depends upon you."

"I wish you would not say that," said Ruby; "I have nothing to do with your comings and goings."

Horace laughed.

"Do you really believe that?" he asked.

"I want you to believe it," said Ruby.

"It is hard when I have come all these miles just to see you, Ruby, and I think this is the first time you have given me a chance of speaking to you alone."

"If so, you might understand, you might remember what I said to you in England. I have not changed my mind—nothing is changed; I wish you had not come."

"You say that now, Ruby; but forgive me, dear, I caught a light in your eyes when I surprised you a fortnight ago which bade me hope. Ruby, you know you love me."

He bent forward, striving to look into her face.

"You are very unkind," said the girl passionately. "You have no right to say that. I wish you would go away."

"Very well, Ruby," answered Horace. "I can wait as Jacob waited for Rachel, only you must let me refresh myself by the sight of you from time to time. I have faith in the future; *now* we will be friends. I am satisfied."

Ruby turned sharply round and looked at him.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean," he answered, "that having known you and

loved you all your life, every glint of your eye, every intonation of your sweet voice, are familiar to me. You wish to be free at present; let it be so. I am content to wait until you come to me of your own will."

Ruby rose and moved away down a shrubbery path, the thick foliage of which hid them from view.

"Horace," she said, "it is no use staying. I do not intend to marry."

"My darling, I love you, and I long for you, and I shall go on loving and longing until"—he paused, raised her hand to his lips and kissed it passionately—"unto the end of life!" he added in a low voice.

Ruby made no answer, she could not, she just ran away; a minute later she was standing behind her father's chair trying to recover her composure.

Horace strolled alone round the compound, and then joining Sir Hubert and two or three officers, he entered into the general conversation as if nothing had happened. Later, when he found himself alone with Sir Hubert, he said, "I think I will go with you to Lahore; as I am here I may as well see something of the country—that is to say, if you do not mind."

"Then your suit has failed again," said Pennington. "I am sorry, old fellow."

"You need not be," said Horace; "if I am not quite satisfied, I by no means despair. Ruby thinks it her duty to remain with her father. We are both young; I can wait. I mean to have a taste of tiger and leopard hunting or any sport which may happen to fall in my way."

"It will kill time, at all events," said Hubert, laughing. "Can you be ready to start to-morrow night?"

"Quite ready," answered Horace. "I engaged a couple of native servants whom the colonel recommended; they will accompany me. All other arrangements I leave to you."

"All right," said Sir Hubert; "but we'll have our ride to-morrow morning with the ladies."

A very merry party met at the Melville bungalow soon after sunrise. Horace seemed to have thrown off the anxiety which had lately hung over him, and Ruby was more at her ease. They rode for the first time side by side, not seeking to avoid each other, and the whole party declared the ride was a very successful one. At the colonel's invitation the men returned to the bungalow for chota hazree.

They had hardly seated themselves when two Government messengers, bringing a despatch for Lieutenant Sir Hubert Pennington, were announced. It proved to be a letter from Captain Nicholson, and ran thus :—

"When you receive this I shall be on my way to Umballa, where I shall be glad if you can meet me. Events have occurred of great importance. I do not care to write particulars, lest my letter should fall into strange hands. Use as much despatch as possible. In haste, yours,

"JOHN NICHOLSON."

"If you will excuse me, colonel, I will speak to the man," said Sir Hubert, rising.

"Certainly," answered the colonel.

Sir Hubert went into the courtyard, where two mounted police awaited his orders.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"We reached the dăk bungalow at Delhi this morning, sahib," answered the foremost. "The Captain Sahib told us we should find your honour there, or learn from the khansamah where you were. He spoke truly; the khansamah informed us you were at the Colonel Sahib's bungalow out here."

"Very good," answered Sir Hubert, "I shall start this

evening. I will telegraph to Captain Nicholson." Then he rejoined his party and told them. "It must be something of great importance for Nicholson to send such a dispatch," he said. "Fortunately everything is arranged for the journey. I shall probably be at Umballa to-morrow night. Do you still intend accompanying me, Bracewell?"

"I wish Captain Nicholson had come here instead of sending for you," said Kate Clifford. "I am longing to see him! He must be something out of the common."

"Very much so," answered Sir Hubert, smiling. "I know you are inclined to hero-worship, Kate," he added; "you could not well find a worthier object."

"Such as you describe him, he must be a grand man," she answered.

And then they all rose from table and dispersed to their different occupations.

"We shall not now be able to linger on the road to Umballa," said Sir Hubert; "it will be your first forced march, Bracewell. When the captain gives the word to march we know we must hurry up."

Horace laughed; he was in unusually good spirits, which rather astonished his companion, but he thought it advisable to make no remark.

They dined at the Melville bungalow, and started on their journey in the cool of the evening. They had decided to ride, relays of horses being ordered to be in readiness at the different stations on the road.

"Well, Ruby," said Colonel Melville, "you have sent him away again?"

"Yes, father," she answered, slipping her arm in his. "I told you I would not leave you for any man."

"I am afraid you are a hard-hearted little puss," said the colonel, stroking her hair caressingly.

"No, I am not hard-hearted," she answered, looking up into his face.

"My darling, I cannot wish you to leave me, yet if anything happened to me you would be very lonely."

"Nothing will happen," said Ruby passionately, throwing her arms round his neck.

"We will hope not," said the colonel, kissing her. "But I should wish to see you married some day, Ruby, and Horace Bracewell is a good fellow."

"There is plenty of time," said Ruby impatiently, and so the matter ended.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A CHARGE.

"SAHIB."

Nicholson turned sharply round.

"Well, what is it, Mirza?" he said, as he saw his faithful Pathăn standing at the entrance of the room salaaming.

"His Mightiness, the great Rajah Futtih Singh, has been dangerously wounded; his spirit is departing, and he has sent to intreat my lord's presence."

In an instant Nicholson had risen.

"Are you saying the truth?" he asked; "if so, how did it come about?"

"My lord sahib's servant does not lie," said Mirza. "Shir Singh waits without; he will answer my lord."

"Fetch him," said Nicholson shortly.

With a low salaam the Pathăn retired, and in a few minutes the purdah was pushed aside and Shir Singh, barefooted, entered. With outstretched hands he salaamed to the ground. Nicholson knew him well as Futtih Singh's confidential secretary.

"What is this Mirza tells me of your master, Shir Singh?" he asked.

"Alas! my lord sahib, his hour has come, his spirit is departing. Yesterday we started for Nishawah; it was a dark night, and as we passed through the big forest that my lord knows of, a man sprang out from behind the

trees, struck the rajah fiercely, and then fled in the darkness, before any of the escort could lay hands on him. I was riding behind my lord, and was able to check his steed and help him to dismount. In the darkness I could not see the magnitude of his wounds; we were able, nevertheless, to stanch the bleeding by means of the linen torn from our turbans; then cutting branches from the trees, we made a litter and laid him thereon. Moreover, I despatched two men back to Lahore for help, we returning on our way. The rajah soon recovered consciousness, and though he was suffering great agonies, bade us hurry homeward. At early dawn we were met by the bearers from Lahore, bringing with them a litter, and about an hour ago we reached the palace. After the physician had examined the rajah and dressed his wounds, which he declared to be mortal, he sent to Amritzir for his beloved daughter and bade me fetch you, my lord sahib."

"I will come at once," said Nicholson. "This is a fearful thing! Have you any idea who committed this murder?" he continued, as he moved about the room, hastily putting away papers, and taking up his cap.

"How should my lord's servant know? The night was dark, the rajah rode in front of his escort, as is his custom."

Nicholson knew well the native character, and was fully aware that he was not likely to obtain any information from Shir Singh which he did not choose to give. He therefore asked no further questions, but passed out, mounted the horse he found awaiting him in the compound, and so rode forth, Shir Singh following.

The palace was about a couple of miles distant. As he approached he saw it was guarded by two hundred and fifty men, whom he knew belonged to a chosen band of Futtih Singh's followers. He and his attendants, however, passed through unquestioned, up the marble

steps, down a long passage also guarded, to a room, across the entrance of which hung a heavy silken purdah. A servant pushed it on one side to permit Nicholson to enter, and there at the farther end on a pile of mattresses and cushions lay the Sikh warrior, and beside him crouched a figure almost undistinguishable for the white draperies which disguised both form and face. A native doctor stood on the opposite side of the couch, and an old man, the princess's munshi, a valued friend of the rajah, at the foot.

One look at Futtih Singh's face sufficed for Nicholson to know that his hours were numbered.

"My friend," said the dying man, making an effort to lift himself.

But the doctor prevented him, and Nicholson stepping quickly forward took the outstretched hand and said, "I am deeply grieved; how did this come about?"

Futtih Singh did not answer him, but turning to the doctor said,—

"Is the notary there? Tell Shir Singh to bring him. I am ready."

Then looking at Nicholson, he said,—

"Those papers must be signed; I have delayed too long."

Once more the purdah was raised, and a native notary entered, accompanied by Shir Singh.

"Are the papers ready?" asked the rajah, addressing him.

"They are, my lord," answered the notary.

"Duplicates?"

"The duplicates also are ready, your Highness," was the reply.

Not a muscle on Futtih Singh's face moved as he said, "Give them me to sign."

As he spoke he put his hand out and touched the kneeling figure by his side, saying,—

"Be comforted, my daughter; it is the will of the Supreme."

Over his handsome face there came a look of almost spiritual beauty.

"They thought to slay the lion," he continued, "and to capture the dove; but as I said she is 'heavenly born,' and a higher power than man's watches over her. They cannot harm her. Give me the pen."

Bowing low, the notary approached the couch. With the help of the doctor and Nicholson Futtih Singh was raised, but even as they did so he said gently, "Do not touch her; let her lie where she is, my White Dove," and again his hand was passed caressingly over the bowed head.

A slight quiver shook the kneeling figure, but no sound broke the silence.

With eager eye, evidently straining to command all his mental faculties, Futtih Singh scanned the sheets which the notary laid before him.

"It is well," he said, a satisfied look coming over his face; taking the pen, he signed his name and titles in full.

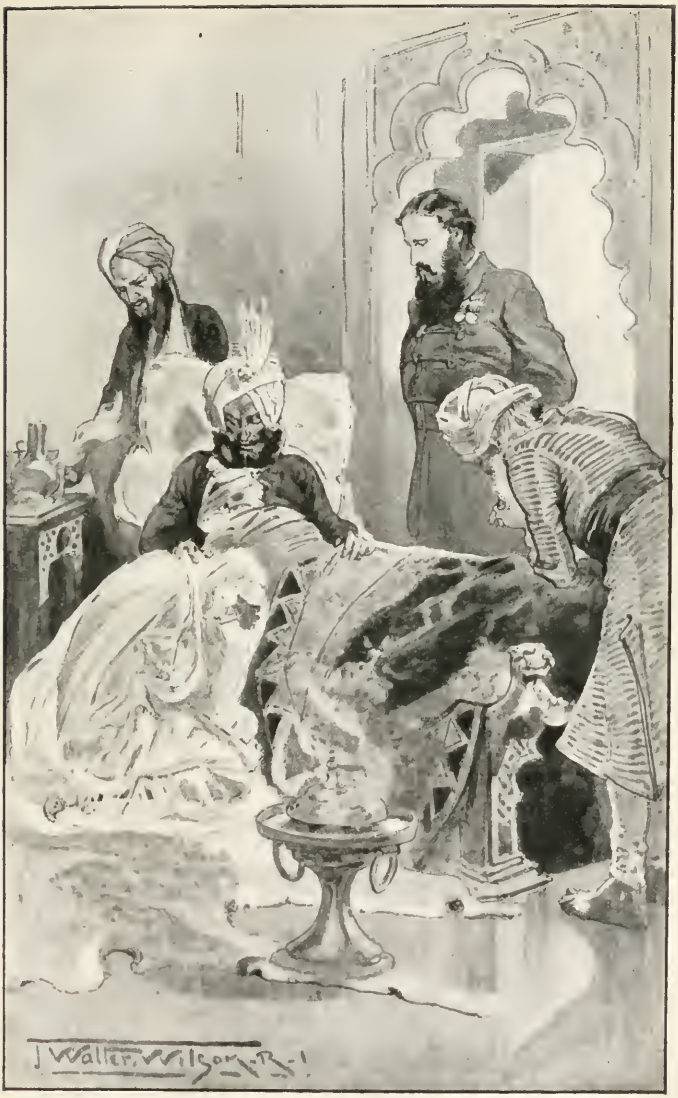
"Now you, sahib," he said to Nicholson.

He also affixed his name, and the doctor did likewise.

After the first signature Futtih Singh fell back upon the cushions, and had to be revived with cordials and strong perfumes; he made a great effort to complete his task, for there were many papers to sign.

When it was over he said to the notary,—

"Fold the duplicates and give them to the sahib. Beware no man lays hands on those under your care. If you deliver them to the proper authority, your reward is fixed—you know it."




"A SLIGHT QUIVER SHOOK THE KNEELING FIGURE, BUT NO SOUND BROKE THE SILENCE." [p. 96.

"Great is the generosity of your Mightiness. I will guard them with my life," said the notary, as he bowed low; and having gathered the papers together he left the room.

At the door a guard of three men awaited him, and at an order from Shir Singh he was conducted by them out of the palace to his own house.

Futtih Singh signed to the doctor to leave him. The man hesitated a moment, but putting a phial into Nicholson's hands, he said,—

"If he faint give him one drop. I will wait outside."

"The Great Unseen will not let me die until my work is done," said Futtih Singh.

When the purdah had fallen across the entrance, he spoke slowly,—

"It is my wife and the youth she desired me to adopt who have done this deed. I told you they would try to slay my White Dove, but they have struck higher. They have their spies, and they knew I had not signed the will. If I died without signing, the treasure would be theirs, and the Dove would fall into their power; so therefore they struck at me. But though I shall die, time has been given me, and they have failed in their purpose. It is the will of God."

A piteous moan and faint cry of "Father" interrupted him.

"My White Dove," said Futtih Singh, "I should have died in battle; it is better to die for love of thee. I am content."

Then he turned to Nicholson.

"You will take her hence this very night. Everything is prepared; runners are on the road; the dăk is laid. Beyond the city walls litters for the women and a faithful escort are in readiness. Shir Singh and Baasha Singh will accompany you. At Delhi I have a house; you will

convey her thither, with the governess Tulsa and her ayah Rhookia. My faithful followers will guard her until such time as you shall arrange to place her as ward under British care. By my will I leave her certain palaces, also much land. She will be the White Ranee, and as long as your care overshadows her no Sikh will raise a hand against the Feringhee. You will need their help, for a dark time is creeping over the land. I have warned you before. The flat cakes are passing from village to village, and I hear the thunder of a great storm gathering. I have prepared for it, and there are those among my men who know it also. Have no fear; call upon them, and they will surround you and be faithful unto death. I, Futtih Singh, one of the old lions of the Punjab, tell you this; if they hesitate, then my daughter, the White Ranee, will show herself, and they will follow. It is said."

He passed his hand underneath the cushion and drew forth a casket; opening it, he took out two gorgeous amulets of diamonds.

"Give me your hand, Azile," he said; and from beneath her white draperies the girl stretched forth an arm and a hand so round, so soft and white, that Nicholson marvelled.

"Who is she?" he thought.

The rajah clasped the dazzling jewels on her wrists, and then pushing back the saree that still hid her face, he looked at her long and earnestly.

"It is for the last time; I have loved thee well, and love cannot die; we shall meet again. My spirit will ever be with thee, sweet; it will flutter around thee like one of thine own doves. Thou hast surely understood what I have said to my lord sahib, and will carry out my behests with all thy power, with all thy strength. And thou *art* strong, though thou knowest it not, for thou hast not yet

been tried. Thy wings will grow, and thou wilt soar upwards bearing others with thee. For this purpose thou wert born—I see it now; for this the Dove settled on the Lion's mane."

There was something prophetic in his enunciation, which had grown stronger and more powerful, startling Nicholson as he listened. Once more the dying man drew a long breath, and then continued,—

"In the days to come I bid thee help and succour the Feringhees. To me thou art heavenly born, my daughter from the land of spirits; but this is not revealed to all."

"Father, am I not your own daughter?" said Azile, and there was something of terror in the girl's voice.

"Aye," he answered, "daughter of my soul and spirit thou art, dearer to me than all the sons and daughters born of earth."

The voice began to fail; with gentle hand, still gazing in her face, he drew the saree over her, saying softly,—

"Farewell, my White Dove; go hence; fear not; we shall meet again. Baasha, take her thou knowest where; thou wilt be faithful; see that thou guardest her well."

"I will be faithful, Futtih Singh," answered the old man.

"It is well," replied the rajah.

At the same moment he touched a silver bell, and Shir Singh entered.

"Conduct the princess hence," said the rajah.

But the girl would not move.

"Let me die too, father," she cried.

"Life and death are in the power of the Supreme, my daughter; be patient, it will come to thee, and thou wilt pass into the land of shadows even as I am passing now."

The voice grew fainter; he signed to Shir Singh, who, lifting the princess, carried her forth, followed by Baasha Singh.

Nicholson, who had been a silent spectator of the scene we have described, now turned and looked at the rajah. He saw his eyes close, and almost feared he might already have passed away; but, obeying the doctor's injunctions, he administered the cordial, and in a few seconds had the satisfaction of seeing him revive.

"Are we alone, sahib?" said Futtih Singh.

To Nicholson's answer in the affirmative he said,—

"That is well. I have still a word to say to you. I have given the Dove to you and to your people; see you guard her. Let her stand alone; her foot may not cross any man's zenana, and no man shall call her wife, save when the great spirit of love shall draw her soul towards another, and she of her own will shall render homage to the stronger. There is no greater power on earth than love; through it alone is man purified, and, forgetting self, lives the double life, his own and yet another's."

Again the inspired look came into his dying eyes, as if he saw vast visions of things to be, unseen to others.

"The storm is rising," he said, lifting himself; "do you not hear it? It is the monsoon. Many will fall upon their faces, be crushed and buried out of sight; the earth will be red with blood. Do you not hear the women's wail and the children's? Ah! it is rising higher and higher, and the nations in the far west cry out in their agony, 'Is there no help, no help? Where is our God?' Take heed unto yourself," he said, turning to Nicholson; "remember where the White Dove flies there you can follow; as long as you are faithful and she is among you, though ye shall suffer much, the Sikhs will be faithful too. You may call upon every tribe, and they will answer to your call and help you. Your race will conquer, but many will fall; alas! the women and the children, take them hence, take them hence!" he continued in wild delirium, throwing forth his

arms as if to sweep the vision from him. "Their white faces are full of terror. I hear them crying, but none answer their loud wailings; love and mercy have passed away. Oh! my White Dove, to the rescue."

He sank back on the pillow, and his eyes closed. Nicholson knew it was death; he shouted for help, those outside rushed in, but the spirit had passed away; the large dark eyes were wide open with a look of horror in them.

Bowing his head, Nicholson went out. He had scarcely crossed the threshold when Shir Singh touched him, saying,—

"This way, my lord sahib."

Nicholson followed him.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WHITE RANEE.

WHEN Nicholson found himself in a narrow street with only Shir Singh and Mirza, he stopped short.

"I must go to my quarters," he said; "I cannot leave Lahore without communicating with the chief commissioner. Where is the princess now?"

"She is in safety," answered Shir Singh, "in the house of friends, but by the night she must be on her way. The Begum will try to lay hands on her at once."

"By to-night I shall be ready," said Nicholson. "In the meantime I must send a message to Delhi; find me the quickest runners—men to be trusted."

"It shall be done as my lord desires," said Shir Singh.

He salaamed low, as, having reached his own quarters, Nicholson entered the house, followed only by Mirza.

"Let some one be sent at once to the chief commissioner Montgomery, to know if he can receive me immediately," said Nicholson to his servant.

Half an hour later he was on the way to the residency, and was closeted with Robert Montgomery.

"I have a strange story to tell you," he said.

Rapidly, and as concisely as possible, he related the events of the past night and his previous connection with Futtih Singh. When he finished, he added,—

"The whole thing is a mystery to me, but I have

passed my word to protect this girl, whoever she may be."

So saying he drew forth the documents that had been given him, and laid them before the commissioner, who, glancing over them, uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Are you aware," he said, "of the enormous fortune Futtih Singh is leaving his adopted daughter? He has been a shrewd man of business, and besides what he possesses in lands and houses has invested large sums of money in native railways and other speculations. The young lady is an heiress, and no ordinary one. Her person and the whole of her property are left in your charge to place under the protection of British rule—a most onerous task. Where may she be at present?"

"In a friend's house, well guarded. The late rajah's wife, indeed the whole zenana, will be in arms against her. He had no legitimate son; but the Begum, according to Indian custom, is at liberty to adopt one and make him his successor. Now by Futtih Singh's will this Princess Azile has virtually precedence over the Begum. I do not know whether legally he had a right to do this; that will be for our Government to decide. Of course no one can interfere with the disposal of his private property. He has left the Begum a substantial income, but the bulk of his property and estates devolves on the princess. The Begum became aware of his intentions through spies there is little doubt, and this has been the cause of the rajah's death. Fearing the same fate would befall the princess, he has desired her removal from the Punjab for the present. So I promised to conduct her to Delhi in the shortest possible time."

"Well, of all men I thought you were the least likely to turn knight-errant," said Montgomery; "but, joking apart, I do not see how I am to spare you at the present

time. I don't like the look of things, and I believe the rajah's warning has reached us none too soon. You are the one man who, if there were an attempt at a native rising, would have the power to stem it, and you see it is just as likely the rajah's presumptive heirs will themselves try to raise a disturbance on the plea that we English are seizing for our own purposes Futtih Singh's estates and money."

"Just so," said Nicholson. "I saw that at once myself; but, nevertheless, I must place the princess in safety, or there are those, friends of the rajah, who, knowing the charge I have received, may turn against us if I do not carry it through. I have sent the fleetest runners off to Delhi to let Sir Hubert Pennington know I want him. He arrived there a fortnight ago. I can trust him. I have told him to meet me at Umballa, where I could be the day after to-morrow with my charge. He will then continue the journey with a goodly escort. What do you say to my plan?"

"Well, with your powers of locomotion," said Montgomery, "you might be back in four days."

"Or less," said Nicholson.

"Then I suppose you must go," assented the commissioner. "I'll keep a good look out in your absence."

Though Shir Singh came in the course of the day to consult with Nicholson, it was quite evident that his plans concerning the princess were already laid in obedience to Futtih Singh's arrangements.

"We must not take her by the great trunk road," he said, "for her enemies will be watching, thinking we shall be conducting her back to Amritzir. I know a path over the hills which will be safer."

"Very well," said Nicholson, "only be as expeditious as possible. I cannot be long absent. I may not go

farther than Umballa. There I shall be met by Lieutenant Pennington, whom you know; to him I shall give the princess in charge. Do you suppose the members of Futtih Singh's family know the real contents of the will?" he asked.

"No, they cannot," he answered; "they feel assured that the princess will be a great heiress, but they do not know that the sahib is to be master, and that the princess is our Ranee. They will learn it before long, and it is because of this that my lord desired she should at once be removed out of their reach."

"Do you consider she will be safe at Delhi? They can reach her there almost as easily as here."

"The lord sahib speaks truly; they can reach her anywhere; their cunning is great and their arms are long. They have spies all over the land, but she will be farther removed at Delhi than at Amritzir, and we too can watch. Then your people will guard her; they are powerful."

"It remains to be seen whether the Government will accept the charge," said Nicholson. "I begin to doubt it."

"Surely not," said Shir Singh.

"Well, we shall see," said Nicholson.

He did not care, even to this man of whose fidelity he had no doubt, to state what he knew to be the case, that the British Government, at this time especially, wished to avoid collision with the native princes.

"I will leave the cantonment to-night," he said, "and will meet you with my escort at Shah-Darrah."

"It is well, my lord. We will enter by the doorway in the garden wall, and await your coming by the tomb of Asij-Jah."

"I have no further orders to give," said Nicholson.

Accepting his dismissal, Shir Singh salaamed low and departed.

As soon as the great heat was over, Nicholson, accompanied by Mirza, rode out to the cantonment of Main-Mir, which lies about three miles from Lahore.

The country round was well timbered, and the cantonment stood on the right bank of the river Ravi, which is crossed by a bridge.

At this time there were stationed there two batteries of artillery, one regiment of British infantry, one of native cavalry, and a regiment of Punjab pioneers. From the latter, with the consent of their captain, Nicholson chose twenty men, and desired them to ride without any apparent object to Shah-Darrah, to station themselves to the west of the mausoleum, and there to await the arrival of two or three palkis accompanied by an escort, belonging to the household of Futtih Singh. The command of the party was given to a native sergeant. Unfortunately for the expedition, it proved to be one of those nights when moon and stars shine forth with such brilliancy that darkness is turned to light.

"There is no help for it," thought Nicholson, as, having dined at the officers' mess, he mounted his horse and rode in the direction of the mausoleum.

The distance was only about a couple of miles, and, as we have said, the land was well wooded. They had scarcely ridden a mile when a man—we might almost say a wild beast in appearance—darted suddenly out of the jungle. Save for the cloth about his loins, he was naked. He threw his long, skinny arms into the air, uttering wild cries and what would have seemed incoherent words; but Nicholson recognised him as a fakir, and understood that he was warning him against an unseen foe. His language was mystic; he threw himself across the path, startling the horses.

Mirza slashed out at him.

"Hold," said Nicholson.

And pulling up his horse, he dropped some coins into the man's outstretched hands.

In a second he was grovelling in the dust, shrieking, "The Gourou, the Gourou!"

Nicholson put spurs to his horse and rode away. He found the Punjab pioneers awaiting him, and, dismounting, left his horse with them, whilst he entered alone, by a door in the wall, a garden surrounding a tomb. Crossing a platform of tesselated coloured marbles, at each corner of which soared a minaret of singular beauty, he found himself in front of the sarcophagus, upon which was engraven the ninety-nine Hindoo names for God; it boasted no other decoration. At the farther end of the once beautiful but now neglected garden he perceived a group of natives and two or three palkis.

Shir Singh seeing him, came forward salaaming.

"The Princess Azile bids me ask your Mightiness if you will speak with her. She is in the first palki."

Nicholson approached instantly, and asked, speaking the dialect of the country,—

"You desire to speak with me, Princess?"

A voice, marvellously sweet and musical, answered him,—

"Shir Singh tells me that it is my father's will that I should leave my palace of Amritzir. What will become of my tiger and my doves and all the things I love? Must they too die?"

"Nay, Princess," answered Nicholson, "you are only going hence for a time. I will give orders that they shall be cared for, even as when you dwelt amongst them."

"I am satisfied," she answered. "I will do your bidding, and go whither you take me."

The curtains of the palki had not been once withdrawn. Accustomed as he was to strange things in life, still the position struck Nicholson's matter-of-fact nature as unpleasantly mysterious.

"It is not in my line," he thought impatiently. "I shall be glad to hand the whole thing over to Pennington."

They travelled throughout the night—indeed, until after the sun had risen the following morning and the heat of the coming day was beginning to be felt; then, so well had Shir Singh calculated upon the endurance of both men and animals, they came upon a camp which had been pitched ready for them.

Scarcely had the princess taken possession of the tent assigned to her and Tulsa than a fluttering of wings was heard, and the soft cooing of doves attracted every ear, and, looking, they saw perched over the entrance to the tent several pairs of snow-white doves, pluming themselves, turning their pretty heads from side to side, and peering down as if to say, "Here we are!"

Almost instantly there came a low responsive call, and a hand was thrust out beyond the curtain; two of the birds swooped down and settled on it, and the hand disappeared again.

Nicholson had seen the occurrence.

"They have been following her ever since she left Amritzir," he reflected, "unless some of her people have brought them, and have just let them loose to give her pleasure. Shir Singh will know."

At that moment he saw Shir Singh coming towards him; he waited until he was close, and then asked,—

"What birds are those, Shir Singh? Did you bring them?"

"Nay, my lord sahib, they are the princess's doves, and have followed her from Amritzir. As we travelled

in the night, I thought I heard a fluttering of wings and an occasional coo; the men also remarked upon it more than once; but we could not make sure in the darkness. No sooner had we reached the camp than they came fluttering down, and by some instinct settled on the princess's tent. She will be happier now; her women told me she had not ceased weeping and would take no food since she left her father and knew that she was not going back to the marble palace. 'All gone,' she has kept repeating, 'all gone.' Her white doves will comfort her; she is but a child with a child's heart."

True, Shir Singh, she was a child yesterday, but the awakening had come. Azile, the beloved, had wept her child's heart away, and in its place was growing a woman's heart. The palace and gardens of Amritzir had been her Eden, and no serpent had ever entered there. Like Eve, she had wandered amongst her flowers, sole mistress of birds and beasts, loving them with a sort of wild tenderness; but now, like Eve, she had been cast out, and she stood bewildered on the threshold of a new life. Her soul was not open enough to wonder; it was like a rosebud when the green petals part and show a faint streak of colour; there is no perfume—that will come as the bud swells and bursts into the perfect flower.

"My pretty ones," she whispered, standing in her tent and caressing the doves as they nestled amid her white draperies.

"They should not have been allowed to follow you," said Tulsa; "your enemies will find out where you are going."

"My enemies! who are they and what are they?" asked the princess.

"Ah! what is the use of my telling you? you would not understand," answered Tulsa.

Azile stopped playing with her doves, raised her head proudly, and said,—

"The time is ripe for me to understand all things. My father told me to be strong; how can I be strong if I do not understand? You must teach me, Tulsa, you and Baasha Singh. I wish to know all things."

"Good, good," answered Tulsa with a strange smile, "you shall. But now you must eat and rest, for we have a long journey still before us."

Azile obeyed, took the food they brought her, and lay down to rest. Soon her two guardians had the satisfaction of seeing her eyes close, and by her soft, even breathing they knew she slept. Then they sat close together and talked. Tulsa told the ayah how Futtih Singh had left all his wealth to his adopted daughter.

"The princess will be great and powerful, but there are those who will work her ill—the Begum and her people; we must watch."

"We will watch," answered Rhookia. "Who should love her if I do not? Did I not receive her in my arms a tiny babe, born before her time? I nursed her; and so she blossomed into a maiden fit for an emperor."

"But she is white," said Tulsa; "she does not belong to our peoples; she is like the white sahibs."

"Did I not tell you she was 'heaven born'?" answered the ayah. "She dropped to earth unformed and grew between my breasts."

Tulsa looked at the woman. They had lived some ten years together, watching the child's growth, yet she had never learnt more from Rhookia of Azile's miraculous birth. Now she was impatient; she had educated the princess; was it not natural that she, her guide and monitress, should also grow rich and powerful? The innate ambition in the woman which had so long lain dormant was aroused.

"Well, well," she answered, "it matters not; she is a great princess, and we must watch over her, guarding her from all men and women alike."

There was no true love in her voice; it was hard and matter-of-fact. Did the ayah hear it? If so, she made no sign, but, rising, went and sat on the ground beside her nursling.

So the dark woman and the white doves kept watch until the heat of the day was over and a soft breeze from the mountains stirred the curtains, and with the sound of outdoor life Azile awoke from her slumbers.

The palki was brought to the door, and once more they proceeded towards Umballa.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A ZENANA.

AS they approached Umballa the idea suddenly struck Nicholson, "Where on earth am I going to lodge the princess and her women?"

Stopping his horse, he looked round for Shir Singh, and seeing him riding beside the princess's palki, he signed to him to join him, which the man accordingly did, bowing low in his saddle.

Nicholson asked him,—

"Have you thought, Shir Singh, where we shall take the princess during the day and night she must remain at Umballa?"

"My lord's servant has thought," answered Shir Singh. "There lives at Umballa Sahib Spinner. Although he is of our colour, he belongs in part to your people—his father married a rajah's daughter. He was my master's friend, and will receive the princess into his zenana, for though he mixes with the Feringhees he follows the customs of his mother's people."

"But your master never allowed his daughter into a zenana, and almost his last words were that she was not to enter one."

"I know of no other place," answered Shir Singh.

Nicholson also knew of nothing better, so he determined to ride on in front and interview Mr. Spinner. He had known him by name for years as being a man of

great wealth, a half-caste; his father had left him his property on condition that a large portion of it should be spent in entertaining. He had a house at Umballa, another at Delhi, and Spinner's hospitality was famous in India; the races, hunts, coursing matches, and nautch dances which he gave were great attractions at both stations.

The fact that he conformed in many respects to native usages and kept a zenana cut him off from the society of European ladies; but he always found guests enough among the officers to enable him to comply with the hospitable provisions of his father's will, and no one was ever turned away from his door. His dinners were of the best, and everything in his establishment was on the most liberal scale.

"It is well," said Nicholson to Shir Singh. "I will ride forward and interview Mr. Spinner. You remain in command and take care the princess is well guarded, for by this time her enemies will have found out that the Dove has forsaken her nest at Amritzir, and will doubtless be on her track."

"Your servant will be watchful as the eagle," answered Shir Singh, falling back; and Nicholson rode on.

He knew Spinner's house was situated at the entrance of the town. It was a spacious, one-storied mansion in a compound filled with shrubberies. A great number of native servants were standing and lounging about when Nicholson and Mirza appeared. They were immediately on the alert, salaaming, then running beside his horse inquiring what the lord sahib desired.

"To speak with your master, Sekunder Sahib," said Nicholson.

He had hardly time to spring from his horse at the foot of the portico when Mr. Spinner himself approached. Nicholson was somewhat startled at his appearance.

His complexion was almost black, and he wore a nondescript half-military dress with the native turban of crimson and gold in a rich silk.

"You honour me greatly, Captain Nicholson," he said in perfect English, with a mingling of Oriental courtesy and the quiet sedateness of a well-bred Englishman. "Your reputation has reached me from many quarters. To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Nicholson held out his hand.

"I have come to ask a service of you," he answered. "Can I speak to you in private for a few moments?"

"Certainly," answered Spinner, and leading the way he conducted his guest into a room half Oriental, half European in its style.

Hardly were they seated when the khitnutgar brought cigars, hookahs, and cool drinks.

"If you will allow me," said Nicholson, "I will tell you first what has brought me here," and he related the story of Futtih Singh and his death.

When he had finished Spinner looked serious.

"I am deeply grieved to hear of the death of my friend, for such Futtih Singh was," he said. "I know from his own lips much of what you have told me. I have often warned him that his exaggerated love for this adopted child would bring trouble upon him. It was not likely that the Begum would suffer quietly such an encroachment on her rights. If the princess had been his daughter it would have been different; but that is not so, for it has got abroad that she is fair as an English maiden with an English type of face. Of course you have not seen her?"

"When Futtih Singh was dying he sent for her, and for a second he partially lifted the saree which enveloped her. Then I caught a glimpse of a white face, also her hand and arm."

"He called her 'heaven born,'" said Spinner with a slight sneer. "I believe, on her mother's side at least, she belongs to your people, unless she be a Kashmeerian."

"I cannot say," said Nicholson impatiently. "What I do know is that Futtih Singh adopted her and has made her his chief heiress. I have neither the time nor the desire to fathom a mystery. Indeed, I wish I had never been mixed up with the affair. But the palkis with their escort are entering the compound. Will you accept her for your guest?"

"Most certainly," answered Spinner; "as you say to all intents and purposes she is Futtih Singh's daughter, and as such must be honoured. I will have the palkis taken round to the women's quarters and bid my mother-in-law receive her. Will you wait for me here? Your men will be well cared for; you need have no anxiety." And he left the room.

"Well, there is nothing for it," thought Nicholson; "she must go into the zenana for a day and night. It is a most awkward position; the girl is neither one thing nor another. I cannot offend mine host by hinting that his zenana is not a fit place for her; besides, what other life lies before her?"

At that moment Mr. Spinner returned, smiling.

"It is all right; the ladies are delighted at having a guest. She will be well cared for; my mother-in-law has taken her under her own wing. Now you will be glad to be rid of the dust of your journey. Your big Pathăn is at the door waiting for you. My bearer will take you to your room."

"Many thanks," said Nicholson. "Will you send to the dăk bungalow and find out if Sir Hubert Pennington has arrived? I am bound to be on my way back to Lahore as soon as possible. The chief commissioner

is anxious, and Sir John Lawrence is gone to the hills, so I am deputing Pennington to escort the princess to Delhi, and place her under the care of the chief commissioner there according to her father's will."

Descending from her palki in an enclosed courtyard, Azile and her attendants were ushered into the women's quarters, commonly called the zenana. A colonnade ran round the building, out of which led rooms and passages innumerable; at the entrance of one of these stood a stout, gorgeously attired woman. Her saree was thrown back, and showed a dark face which had now no pretensions to beauty; the eyes, however, were still fine, the eyelids deeply stained with kohl or antimony, which made them look larger and more languishing than they would otherwise have done. This was Mora, Mr. Spinner's mother-in-law, who, as in all native households, took the chief government.

"You are welcome," she said, addressing Azile. "You must be weary after your journey; will you take your bath and refresh yourself first, then join us? I will fetch you."

She spoke kindly, and there was something in her manner which attracted Azile; but before she could answer Tulsa interposed, saying haughtily,—

"The princess will remain in her room; she never appears in public."

"Indeed," said Mora, "then she will cause great disappointment; we do not often have visitors, and we have prepared a feast for the princess, which we trust she will honour."

"The princess is mourning for her father; it is not seemly she should feast," answered Tulsa.

"That is true; my lord Sekunder Sahib did not say the rajah's death had been so recent."

Suddenly purdahs were thrust aside and female figures

came forth, women and girls, some with children in their arms or clinging about them, a noisy, jabbering troop.

"Ah! but she must eat of our sweetmeats, she must smoke a hookah!" exclaimed several, and closing round Azile they touched her white dress, admiring the silver lace and pearls with which it was ornamented, and startling the doves which nestled on her shoulders under the folds of her saree, so that the birds broke forth in a low, distressed coo.

"Ah! what is it? what is it?" exclaimed the women. "Is she a dove herself?"

Half dragging, half leading Azile, they carried her off to a long, low room thickly carpeted. All around the walls were cushions of gorgeously embroidered silks and damasks, among which lay dusky forms, whilst others sat on the floor, their legs doubled under them, smoking a peculiar perfumed tobacco, the smoke being conducted through rose-water. These dark beauties were clad gaily with much crimson and gold about their persons, their arms laden with bangles, and around their ankles bands of gold, and precious stones gleamed above their naked feet. In the privacy of the zenana their faces were uncovered, exposing to view the white teeth, red lips, and lustrous eyes.

This room to which Azile had been conducted was the general room, which we should call the *salon* of the zenana, where all the ladies met and aired their grievances in common.

When the slim, tall, white figure entered, there was a murmur of satisfaction, and little hands were clapped in almost childish delight. This advent of a stranger was an event in the monotony of their lives. They clustered round her, and with light hands threw back the saree. Azile stood uncovered before them, her fair face blushing rosy red, her soft, liquid blue eyes looking round her with

an expression of mingled fear and astonishment, which increased when the cry was repeated from one to the other,—

"See, see, she is a white Ranee!"

Others cried,—

"Is she a widow that she is clothed all in white?"

"No, no," said another, "do you not see she has jewels, and fine ones too?"

She lifted Azile's arms and pointed to the amulets of pearls and diamonds with which her father had so lately encircled them.

When Azile heard the words, "She is a white Ranee," she started.

Of course she knew she was white, and once when she had asked Futtih Singh how it was she differed in this respect from those around her, he had answered, "It was the will of the Supreme; He ordered it so." Tulsa and Baasha Singh her preceptor had said the same, so she thought no more about it until now, when it seemed to her there was a reproach in the words. She stood in their midst, slim and maidenly, taller than the tallest amongst them, with her pure virgin face unsullied by any trace of passion; her lips strove to smile, but somehow the tears welled up into her eyes instead.

"I do not know why my skin is white like the Feringhees'," she answered; "my father told me it was the will of the Supreme."

A laugh, which jarred upon the maiden's sensitive nerves and caused her to shiver, greeted her words.

"He did not tell you your mother was a Feringhee, did he?" asked a woman standing near her, with a slight sneer.

"No, I never had a mother; I am heavenly born. Ask Rhookia; she knows."

Again they laughed.

"I told you she was not to go amongst them, she is a born innocent," exclaimed Tulsa; "let me pass." She strove to push her way through the circle which encompassed Azile, but they would not let her. "No, no," they said, "she belongs to us, she is our guest; we will take good care of her—Sekunder Sahib bade us."

They drew closer round her, whilst two of them took her by the hand, and leading her to a pile of cushions bade her be seated, and they threw themselves down beside her, at her feet, laughing and chattering.

Suddenly there appeared a troop of little pages, dressed most gorgeously, carrying golden salvers heaped high with fruits and flowers; others followed with all manner of sweetmeats, and goblets filled with sparkling sherbet.

Again there was a great clapping of hands, and expressions of pleasure as they fell upon the dainties, so that for a few seconds Azile was forgotten.

Rhookia took the opportunity of forcing her way to where she sat, and said,—

"Tulsa bids me tell you you must come hence; I will make way for you."

"No," answered Azile, "I will stay here. I must learn to live, and how can I live if I do not understand what life is? Tulsa and Baasha Singh stand between me and the world, and you will tell me nothing. My father is gone from me, so I have tasted sorrow, and whither it leads I must surely follow; it is fate."

"Will you not eat of our fruits and sweetmeats?" said a dusky maiden, pushing one of the pages towards her.

She was the youngest and prettiest of those present; her name was Kishna; and though Azile did not know it, she was, for the time being, queen of the zenana; even Mora had to yield to her.

"There, taste! these are very good," she said, dropping

a handful of comfits in Azile's lap; and then sinking on to the cushions beside her, waved her little hand and said imperiously,—

"Keep back, all of you; go and eat, then return when I bid you."

Strange to say, though they murmured and cast evil looks on their companion they obeyed, and fell upon the fruit and sweetmeats like children, which in mind they really were.

"Ali," whispered Kishna to a little page, "be good and I will give you two annas."

"What do you want, Kishna?" said the child.

"Two hookahs and fresh rose-water," she replied, looking up at him and smiling.

He smiled back again, nodded, and glided away.

"There," said the girl, "now we will talk quietly. Tell me how old you are."

Azile smiled.

"Rhookia says it is sixteen summers since my father gave me to her to nurse."

"That is old. I am only twelve," said Kishna. "Who is your lord? Are you his first wife? Are there many in your zenana?"

"My father was my lord, and he is dead. I am no wife. I lived alone in my marble palace with Tulsa and Rhookia and my maidens. Baasha Singh taught me."

Kishna's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"No zenana! and you were taught! Can you read and work?"

Azile smiled.

"I can read Persian and Hindustanee and a little English. Baasha Singh is a very clever munshi."

"What good will it do you?" asked Kishna wonderingly; then without waiting for an answer she continued,

"Why did you not live with your father's wives in the zenana? They must be jealous of you and hate you."

Azile shook her head.

"I do not know," she answered. "What do you all do here?"

She turned her deep blue eyes full upon the girl. Kishna laughed. Just at that moment the boy Ali brought the hookahs; she took one and handed the other to Azile, who laid it on her lap and repeated,—

"Tell me what you do here?"

"Ali," said Kishna, "tell the White Ranee what we all do here."

The boy grinned, showing his white teeth.

"Quarrel and fight," he said.

"Just so, until the master or Mora interferes and makes peace. Sometimes we nearly tear each other's eyes out. But I have Sekunder Sahib's ear to-day. I am queen; and though Mora may scowl, she knows my lord likes young faces and laughing eyes, so she lets me have my way."

Then throwing herself back on her cushions, she talked in a low, mysterious voice, and Azile listened till her lips grew white, and a frightened look came into her eyes. She did not speak, she made no sound, but there crept over her a silent horror, and as she listened her thoughts went back to her white marble palace, so full of light, the silken purdahs waving in the breeze, the lovely garden, the scent of flowers, her tiger and her doves.

Had she dreamt till now, and was this the awakening? Was this the life she had desired to know, and which they told her would be hers? Only lately had sorrow come to her, touching strings of her soul, silent until then. They would never be so again, but would quiver and throb through all the different phases of existence—love, pleasure, hatred, pain. Now another chord had been

touched; as the girl whispered in her ear, even as the serpent whispered to Eve in Eden, the "sense life" came to her. She shivered, she knew not why, and instinctively gathered her saree closer round her. Her doves had settled in her lap, pecking at the fruit and sweetmeats she had not touched; nervously she took one up and buried her face in the soft white feathers. She did not know that even at that moment her fate was in the balance.

The master Sekunder Sahib was watching her from behind a glazed curtained aperture in the wall of a closet close by the zenana *salon.*

There was a look of astonishment on his dark face. "She is very beautiful," he muttered between his white teeth, "but there is no black blood under that white skin, not one drop. The rajah must have stolen her. But why did he not marry her? She is of age. Well, she will make a change. Poor Kishna, she will weep!" He turned away with a strange smile, and an indescribable expression of mingled lust and desire.

As if she felt the presence of some evil spirit near her, Azile shuddered and looked anxiously around her; she saw nothing—still she trembled.

"What ails you?" asked Kishna.

"I do not know," she answered. "Rhookia, take me hence; I am strangely weary."

Then the ayah carried Azile off to the room prepared for her, gave her the scented bath; and combed her fair hair, smoothing it with long, deft fingers as tenderly as a mother might have done. By the intuition of love she divined something of the sorrow in the young heart, and she sang to her until the wearied eyelids closed, and in sweet sleep the awakening soul forgot that it had tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A BARGAIN.

WHEN the messenger sent by Mr. Spinner reached the dăk bungalow, he found that Sir Hubert Pennington and Horace Bracewell had just taken their baths, changed their clothes, and were smoking in the verandah whilst the khansamah prepared breakfast.

"Tell your master we will come to his house as soon as we have eaten," said Pennington, "and will gladly accept his hospitality. You say Captain Nicholson arrived this morning?"

"Yes, my lord sahib, and the princess also."

"The princess! what princess?" asked Sir Hubert with surprise.

"Does not my lord know that the Princess Azile, daughter of Futtih Singh, is on her way to Delhi under the care of the sahib, Captain Nicholson?"

Much as the information astonished him, Sir Hubert did not care that the native should be made aware of his complete ignorance, so he merely answered, "It is well," and dismissed the man.

"The lord sahibs' breakfast is ready," announced the khansamah a few minutes later, salaaming to the ground.

The two men sat down to the meal, during which Sir Hubert told Horace of the visit to Futtih Singh's tikana, and the little he knew of the White Dove of Amritzir.

"It is a perfect romance, such as one might associate with the Middle Ages, but certainly not in these matter-of-fact, nineteenth-century days," said Horace. "I am curious to hear the sequel. Why is our friend taking her to Delhi? Do you suppose he has been smitten, and intends making her his wife?"

"I do not suppose anything of the sort," answered Sir Hubert. "In fact, I think it doubtful whether he has so much as seen her. I caught a glimpse of her by mere chance, and I never was more astonished in my life. She is as fair as an English girl, with lovely blue eyes." He stopped short, as if something had suddenly struck him; but the idea, whatever it was, was so vague, that he thrust it from him, merely adding, "Of course there is a mystery about the girl, which we shall find out in due time; probably Nicholson knows it already. Futtih Singh had implicit faith in him."

A few hours later Sir Hubert and Bracewell had themselves conveyed to Mr. Spinner's residence. A large, cool room, luxuriously furnished and opening on to the verandah, had been set apart for their private use; and here John Nicholson explained the service he required of Sir Hubert.

"Do you really mean to say I am to go back to Delhi to-morrow?" said Pennington, in a dissatisfied tone.

"I see nothing else for it," answered Nicholson. "The chief commissioner distinctly ordered me to return at once. Besides, I feel the necessity of not absenting myself from Lahore. There is an undercurrent of excitement amongst the native troops which bodes no good. What is the feeling at Delhi?"

"Oh, they go on just as usual," answered Sir Hubert. "I have heard more than one English officer say that if the Sepoys were inclined to mutiny they would have done

so long ago, that they have not the remotest idea of anything of the sort, and that all this talk about it is enough to put it into their heads."

"Well, I hope such may prove to be the case," said Nicholson; "but for myself I shall be glad when the year is out. You know the prophecy?"

"Oh yes," answered Sir Hubert. "It is one hundred years since the battle of Plessy, and the English raj* is over. Surely you do not believe such nonsense?"

"Whether I believe it or not is of little importance; the natives believe it, and the princes will make a try to recover their ancient power," answered Nicholson; "whether they will succeed is another question. You must know that since the annexation of Oude the dissatisfaction has been general. But all this does not settle our present business. Will you or will you not conduct the princess to Delhi, Pennington? I know it does not come under the duties of your service, but still it is important. Futtih Singh has left his adopted daughter to the British Government; she is enormously rich, and we cannot suffer her to be carried off and fleeced by some native prince. I may as well tell you at once that when I went back with him to Amritzir Futtih Singh gave me some sort of explanation as to how he came by the child. It was not very clear, but it is evident she is a foundling, either of English or Kashmeerian origin; at this distance of time it is impossible to ascertain any facts, even if it were worth while. The rajah has given her a social status, and wealth to maintain it; that is all we require to know. The Begum is enraged at being despoiled, and will do the princess an evil turn if she can; and to get her out of her enemy's way she is being sent to Delhi. Will you take her?"

* Rule.

"Of course, if you and the commissioner tell me to undertake the charge, I must," said Sir Hubert. "How am I to go about it?"

A writing-table occupied the centre of the room, on which Nicholson proceeded to lay several sheets of paper written in the native Punjab.

"You will give these to the commissioner; they are duplicates of title-deeds from the British Government to Futtih Singh for several of his estates which are now to be made over to his daughter. This is a copy of the will. Of course the carrying out of this will comes under Lawrence's jurisdiction, but it will be necessary that the home Government should be advised. The sooner we get her off our hands the better."

As he uttered the last words Spinner's tall figure appeared at the door leading into the verandah.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "I was passing and accidentally heard your last remark. I presume you are alluding to the princess. Certainly your position is difficult; but if you will allow me, I think I could simplify it greatly."

"How?" said Nicholson.

"Well, you see," replied Spinner, smiling and throwing back his dark head, "you look upon this business from a strictly European point of view, while I view it in the native light. If you will take this into consideration, I think you will find your difficulties disappear."

"I do not understand you," said Nicholson; "pray explain your meaning."

"Let us be seated then," replied Spinner, as he threw himself on to a lounge, and ordered the khansamah to bring hookahs, cigars, and cool drinks; this done, Mr. Spinner resumed: "Do you know the first error you are making, and one which greatly increases your difficulties?"

"No," said Nicholson, "what is this error?"

"You forget you have to deal with a native girl, for, whatever her complexion may be, Futtih Singh's adopted daughter comes under that denomination. Why, therefore, should you burden yourselves with her future? You have only to do for her what, if he had been a sensible man, Futtih Singh would himself have done—marry her to a native of her own rank. Believe me, she will become a source of disquietude to your Government. When once the rajahs are aware that she is Futtih Singh's heiress, they will then come forward, anxious to wed her, according to the native customs, and there will ensue much jealousy."

"That means they will add her to their zenanas," said Nicholson.

"They will give her a position suited to her wealth," answered Spinner. "It is not customary with us to speak of our private households, but I wish to tell you that I am myself ready to marry her."

The three Englishmen simultaneously stopped smoking, and stared at him.

"Why, if I have heard rightly you have a well-filled zenana already, Mr. Spinner," said Nicholson, "and you are old enough to be this girl's father. Besides, it is no business of mine; she is virtually a ward of the Government."

"It is, as I said, your utter ignorance of native customs which allows you to make such a remark to me," said Spinner with unruffled temper. "Your European ideas of marriage and giving in marriage cannot apply to us. The princess must marry a native prince, according to native rules; and such being the case, why not me as well as another? I am a rich man, could administer her property, and am in British interests. I have seen the maiden, and she pleases me. I would take care her position in my house-

hold should be in accordance with her rank and fortune, and all legal formalities with regard to the marriage would be carried out. Will you consider the matter, and lay it before your Government?"

Neither Sir Hubert nor Bracewell had spoken, but their manner testified sufficiently to their disgust, and they gave vent to a satisfied grunt when Nicholson thundered out, "No, I will not." He paused for a moment, as if to put some restraint on his feelings. "I will have nothing to do in the matter," he added.

"I mean no offence," answered their host. "If you had been her own father, I should have made the same offer; it is a mere matter of custom. You do not suppose the princess will herself be satisfied to remain a maiden. You will have to provide a husband for her before long. I believe she is sixteen, rather old to be unmarried."

"My business is to convey her to Delhi," said Nicholson; "then I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Very well," said Spinner; "there is nothing to prevent my offering myself as a suitor. I can take my chance with others."

"Certainly you will be quite at liberty to do so," answered Nicholson.

Spinner rose.

"I can assure you," he said, "I made the proposition as much in your own interest as for my pleasure. I foresee you will have trouble with the princess. The Begum is not likely to allow herself to be despoiled quietly, and there are those who will be only too ready to say you are despoiling a native lady for one of your own people; for it is well known that the Princess Azile is white, and must be of European origin. If I took her under my protection, it would satisfy all parties, and you would have

no further trouble. But you are my guests, I should be sorry in any way to offend; let the matter drop. Make your arrangements; I will give orders that everything shall be ready for your departure to-morrow at sunrise. Now I will ask you to forget this conversation, to settle your business as quickly as possible, then give yourself up to enjoyment. I have engaged a troupe of the best nautch girls to dance after dinner for your entertainment. They have just arrived from Delhi, and from personal experience I know them to be most exceptionally good; indeed, perfect artistes."

"It is very courteous of you," said Nicholson. "I am sure we shall enjoy it greatly, especially Mr. Bracewell, who has had no previous opportunity of seeing these famous Indian dancers; they are really a feature in the national customs."

"Well, then, I will leave you for the present," said Spinner, and, rising, he lounged out through the verandah.

The three men were silent. Sir Hubert went softly to the door, looked to the right and to the left, then he turned round and uttered the one word—

"Brute!"

To which Bracewell replied,—

"Are such bargains of common occurrence in this part of the world?"

"I presume they are, though I never had such an experience before," said Nicholson; "of course we all know zenanas are horrid places, and every native has a plurality of wives, but certainly there is something intensely repugnant in treating a girl just like a bale of goods."

"And such a girl!" said Sir Hubert between his teeth. "I tell you what, Nicholson, I believe there has been foul work, and that this supposed daughter of Futtih Singh

is a real English girl, who must have been kidnapped when she was an infant. I really think the matter ought to be looked into."

"My dear fellow, if you like to play knight-errant you can. I have far more serious business on hand; let us finish looking over these papers, and then we will ride before dinner. Have you made up your mind to go on with me to Lahore, or back with Pennington to Delhi, Mr. Bracewell?"

"I think I shall go back," said Horace; "you see, time is of no importance to me."

"And there are attractions at Delhi?" said Nicholson, smiling.

"Yes, I came out here to try and hold my own," answered Horace quietly.

Never during the years they had lived together in close intimacy had Nicholson known Sir Hubert so contrary and irritable as he proved that day; as a rule he was an easy-going fellow and pleasant companion: he was *neither* on the present occasion—in fact, he refused to ride; and as Nicholson and Bracewell mounted their horses, they heard him ask the bearer "Whether the Sekunder Sahib were at home?"

The answer was in the affirmative.

"Then go and ask him if he will honour me by playing a game of billiards while the sahibs are out riding?"

The last Nicholson saw of him was as he walked up and down the verandah, looking positively sulky.

"If I did not know it to be impossible, I should say our friend was in love with the invisible maiden," said Horace Bracewell, smiling.

"He is annoyed at going back to Delhi, that's what is the matter with him," said Nicholson.

When they returned, they found Sir Hubert and Mr.

Spinner sitting in the verandah in high good humour, the former listening to his companion's stories with more complacency than might have been expected.

Mr. Spinner treated them right royally that night. After a sumptuous dinner the nautch girls were introduced, about ten in number, dressed in long, loose muslin or silk trousers, richly embroidered with gold threads reaching to the ankles, and then trailing behind, skirt-wise. A muslin saree was wrapped many times round their bodies, and brought over their heads, but did not hide their faces, which were by no means handsome ; the hair was dragged back "à la chinoise," and a precious stone set in gold between the eyes. They were also adorned with amulets, anklets, nose and ear-rings. They wore neither shoes nor stockings, but the soles of their feet and palms of their hands were stained red with henna. The lids of their dark eyes were also stained with kohl.

They danced two by two to the music of the guitar, drum, and sitar, swaying their bodies to and fro and beating their feet on the ground in time to the music. As they danced they sang Persian songs, a few of which were very simple, but others extremely coarse. The entertainment lasted till a late hour, and then, to both Nicholson's and Bracewell's astonishment, Sir Hubert declared it was not worth while going to bed, and he challenged his host to another game of billiards.

Spinner, though he showed no eagerness, could not well refuse, so they all adjourned to the billiard-room, and the early dawn of the Indian day found them still knocking the balls about.

"You will just have time to take your baths and breakfast before your horses and palkis come round," said Spinner, as he threw down his cue. "We may say we have had a night of it," he added, laughing.

"I am afraid we have abused your hospitality," said Sir Hubert, whose good humour had evidently returned.

"Not at all," answered Spinner; "it is always a great pleasure for me to entertain Englishmen, and I am only sorry your visit is so short."

Then each went his way to prepare for the journey.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DACOÏTS.

THE compound was alive with horses, palkis, bangy-wallahs (bearers) with the long rod across their shoulders, upon which were hung the pittarahs (bags or tin boxes) containing the luggage of the travellers; then came the escort, which consisted of a dozen armed Sikhs summoned by Shir Singh to replace the guard of native pioneers, who were to return with Nicholson. They had brought with them from Amritzir the princess's white elephant.

"You have done well," said Mr. Spinner; "it will be far pleasanter for the princess to ride than to travel in a palki; at least, during the morning hours. Let it be taken round to the women's court. What a beautiful creature it is!" he continued, watching as the mahout led it away.

The elephant no longer carried its delicate white trappings; for the journey crimson and gold were substituted; and, as if it scented the near presence of its mistress, the animal held its trunk high in the air, and gave vent to a loud roar, which reached Azile and made her pale cheeks flush with pleasure.

"It is my dear Mowgli," she exclaimed; and covering her face with the saree, she went out into the court. The animal knelt at once, waving its great trunk to and fro, and turning its eyes in the direction whence her voice came. She stood beside him for some minutes caressing

him; then, having taken leave of her companions of a day, she mounted into the howdah. Rhookia took the place beside her, Tulsa preferring the more luxurious palki. Then Mowgli rose, and with dignified steps, as if proud of its burden, moved forth.

As they appeared in the compound Sekunder Sahib approached.

"I wish you a good journey, Princess, and pray it may not be long before fate brings me across your path once more."

"Sekunder Sahib," answered a sweet, clear voice, "you were my father's friend. I thank you for your hospitality in his name." As if he understood that the interview was at an end, without any urging from the mahout Mowgli moved slowly across the compound. The Sikhs, as guards of honour, closed round the princess, the palkis and the bearers followed, and the rear was brought up by Sir Hubert and Bracewell with their personal attendants and syces.

"You may be sure I shall not linger on the road either to or from Delhi," said the former, as he bade John Nicholson farewell. "But I will not answer for Bracewell; if once he gets into the charmed circle again, I am afraid even the prospect of tiger and leopard hunting will lose all attraction for him."

"And who shall say he will not choose wisely?" said Sekunder Sahib. "A woman's smile is surely worth a tiger hunt!"

Sir Hubert did not answer him, he merely doffed his cap in farewell; but as he rode away he muttered between his teeth,—

"As if he could know anything about a woman's smile!"

"Rhookia," said Azile, "did you notice, it is no longer the dark sahib, but the fair one who is in command?"

"Yes," said Rhookia, "but there are two sahibs now; one is a big giant. You are well guarded, Princess."

The girl smiled sadly.

"I wish I were free, Rhookia," she said, "like the birds, to fly up to the skies and down to earth, just as I willed. Am I going to be shut up in Delhi, within a dark courtyard, in rooms where the sweet air and the sunlight never seem to penetrate, like what we have just left? If so, I shall die," and she shuddered.

"It is the fate of high-born women," said Rhookia. "You were content in the white marble palace, you seldom went beyond the garden walls; why should you fear now?"

"That was different," answered Azile.

She ceased speaking, but sat gazing, through the chinks in her curtains, out into that fair world to which she hardly seemed to belong. As they passed through the villages, she watched with strange eagerness the women at the doors of their mud huts, with children in their arms, or rolling in the dust at their feet; they were poor, they were miserable, but she envied them, for, to her, they were comparatively free. She could not know that, as they salaamed on her passage, they too sighed and murmured,—

"She is blessed, a great princess; she knows nothing of the wants and misery of the poor!"

This journeying was a great delight to Azile. She felt no sensation of fear as they crossed the bed of the rivers, full of white stones and boulders. She joyed in the waving of the great trees, and listened eagerly for the note of the wild birds. She watched the sun as it rose, coming, as it seemed to her, from over the great mountains, and flooding the plains with light. Everything was new to her; the bullocks yoked to the carts, the sheep and goats winding their way to pasture, the husbandman

urging on the oxen and plough along the furrow, were pictures which she saw for the first time, and they were a wonder to her.

Souls do not attain to their full growth in an hour or a day; if it were so, nature would be at fault. The tiny soul of the babe has no power; it looks out in wonder, faintly striving to understand. Will light come to it through the darkness? will rays from heaven illumine it? or will the shadows of earthly sin and sorrow weigh it down so that no growth be possible?

Mothers, pray for light—not visual, but spiritual; let it steep your souls so that the atom born of you may have strength and power to struggle into perfect day, a child of light.

Through this transformation phase Azile was passing from the passive to the active stage; not without pain—no development is without a struggle, the throes of nature. Each sight she saw, each sound she heard, touched some new chord in her being, and it echoed back the notes in perfect harmony.

During the heat of the day they rested, starting again in the short Indian twilight, so soon to yield to night. Then the princess travelled in her palki. Their way lay through a thick jungle composed mostly of dăk-trees, the strange growth of which, with their bare, twisted roots, bunches of green, dusty-looking leaves, and deep bronze-coloured blossoms, cast fantastic shadows in the moonlight.

Having travelled so far in safety, and being comparatively near their journey's end, all fear of danger threatening the princess had died out. The palkis and the bearers advanced as quickly as they could through the jungle with the escort, Sir Hubert and Bracewell following leisurely.

Suddenly, without any warning, there came through the jungle a rush of dark figures, a flash of steel, and the palkis were surrounded. Then the shrieks of the women rose shrill and loud, the bearers dropped their burdens and fled, yelling with terror, "The Dacoïts! the Dacoïts!"*

In less time than it takes to tell, Sir Hubert and Bracewell were in the midst of the fray, shouting to the Sikhs to charge; but even as they did so, every hand was stayed by what in the fitful light of the moon and stars might well have been taken for a supernatural vision.

There stood, leaning against a dăk-tree, a tall white figure with one arm raised, and in the hand something which gleamed like gold. The face was uncovered, the head thrown back, whilst a mass of hair light and feathery fell around, and eyes like stars, so clear and bright, shone in the darkness.

"Good heavens! the princess!" exclaimed Sir Hubert; and in the second which ensued he fought his way towards her, followed by Horace; but the Dacoïts saw him, and, before he could reach the dăk-tree, a shot was fired. Springing forward he sought to cover the princess with his own body, but too late—she had fallen. With drawn swords striking out to the right and left he and Horace stood over the fallen girl. The Sikhs also, led by Shir Singh, were fighting manfully, doing their best to drive their assailants back into the jungle.

Two men tall and lithe so harassed Sir Hubert and Horace that all their attention was required to parry the swing of their tulwars and to cover the princess; nevertheless, Sir Hubert managed to say to his companion, "I must get the princess away. They have determined to take her, dead or alive. Can you hold them at bay a few minutes?"

* Highway robbers.

"All right," answered Bracewell.

As good luck would have it, at that moment Shir Singh fought his way up to them, and with a shout fell on one of the men. Profiting by this Sir Hubert stooped, raised the white figure in his arms, dodged behind the trees, and then ran to where the palkis had been. There they still were, but the bearers had fled; his own syce, however, stood there holding his horse. He could not mount encumbered as he was.

"Follow me," he exclaimed, and continued running.

"All right, sahib," answered the syce, starting after him with the horse.

Then the question arose in Sir Hubert's mind, was he carrying a dead or a living woman? He glanced down at the girl as she rested against him, and to his astonishment was met by an answering look from eyes which shone even in that fitful light.

"Are you hurt?" he asked in Hindustanee.

"Yes, my arm," she answered.

Then he noticed that her white dress was stained with blood. What should he do? Would she bleed to death? On he ran, not daring to stop, the tramping of the horse behind him.

Suddenly, the aspect of the jungle changed, the trees ceased, and a wild, uncultivated plain opened out before them.

"At least," thought Sir Hubert, "I shall see now if there are enemies before or behind."

The moon was still hidden, but the night was clear under the broad starlight. He stopped and said gently,—

"I think we are out of their way now. Will you let me try and bind up your arm, for we are, I fear, far from a subzimundi,* and you must be faint with loss of blood?"

* Native dăk stations.

Even as he spoke, he let her slip to the ground. The night dew was so heavy he could not lay her on the moist earth.

"Can you stand?" he asked, still holding her up.

"Yes," she answered, "I am not much hurt," and she made an effort to lift the injured limb, but could not do so; the blood was trickling from it, and when Pennington raised it gently he thought that it was broken.

He felt a slight tremor run through her frame, but she did not flinch nor faint, only she threw back her saree with the other hand and drew a long breath.

"How brave you are!" said Sir Hubert, looking at her.

It seemed to him she was like one of those early maiden martyrs, her face was so pure and calm, with the long hair falling over her white, blood-stained robe.

He had no time for contemplation; the syce with the horse came up, and drawing out his handkerchief he proceeded to bind her arm tightly, so as to stay the bleeding. Then he tore a long strip of muslin off her saree, made a sort of sling, and so completed the primitive dressing.

"I cannot go back for your people," he said; "you must ride my horse; I will walk on one side, my syce on the other. Shall you be frightened?"

She shook her head, looking at him with her large blue eyes, seeming to say,—

"Afraid! What should I be afraid of?"

Sir Hubert felt the colour mount to his brow, and a strange thrill of gladness, such as he had never experienced before in all his life, came over him. He lifted her on to the saddle, passed one arm round her slight form so as to steady her, and, bidding the syce lead the horse, they moved forward.

She sat straight up, giving no sign of weakness, the torn saree fluttering in the breeze. In the faint light of

early dawn, when day was struggling with night, he more than once caught sight of a sweet, pale face with lips firmly set.

"How brave she is!" he thought. "I have heard native women are cowards, but she is no native. How white her face is! Are you in pain?" he asked her once again.

"Is this pain? I do not know," she answered.

"Have you never suffered before?" he asked in astonishment.

"Never," she replied.

Even as the "First *Truth* Sorrow" had come to her, so now the knowledge of Pain came; but though she knew it not the healer was at hand, and as the rosy streak of morning in the distant horizon was the dawn of that fair soul.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A STRANGE GUEST.

KATE and Ruby had just left their rooms to breathe the morning freshness, and were still sitting idly in the verandah, when their attention was roused by seeing two men, leading a horse, enter the compound.

"Sir Hubert!" exclaimed Kate, rising. "Something has happened! Who has he brought with him?"

The horse stopped at the steps, and Sir Hubert lifted the white figure down. The two girls were instantly beside him.

"Do not ask me any questions now," he said. "Just take her to your room, put her to bed, and send for the doctor. She is, I am afraid, badly hurt. I have brought her here because I did not know what else to do with her. Where is your father?"

"Father has been sent for to Meerut," answered Ruby.

Even while they were speaking she had put her arm round the drooping figure and was supporting it up the steps. The face was entirely hidden from view.

"Are you much hurt?" Ruby asked.

But no answer came, and Sir Hubert said,—

"Get her indoors quickly. I will tell you afterwards who she is and what has happened. I will send my syce for Dr. Batson."

Then Ruby and Kate saw that her dress was stained with blood. It was of soft white silk richly embroidered

with pearls, and the muslin saree was of the finest; but the costly garments were soiled and torn; nevertheless, they could not but be struck by the natural grace and elegance of the tall, slim figure.

"We will take her to my room," said Ruby; and crossing the verandah they disappeared down the corridor, followed by Jane and the two ayahs. An hour later Dr. Batson, having paid his visit, came out to Sir Hubert as he sat in the verandah.

The doctor's face was expressive of the greatest astonishment, as he said,—

"How on earth, Sir Hubert, did you come across that girl?"

In as few words as possible Sir Hubert explained the position to him.

"But she's white, a perfect type of a beautiful English girl, as lovely a creature as I have ever set eyes on; and that is saying a good deal. Your Futtih Singh must just have stolen her."

"Not according to his own account," answered Sir Hubert shortly, "and we have no other authority to go upon, nor, as far as I can see, are we likely to have. I should feel obliged, Doctor, if you would keep the whole thing as quiet as possible; in the cantonment, of course, something will ooze out, but the less said about the princess the better. Is she much hurt?"

"Why, yes," replied the doctor; "the bone is grazed, but not broken; the bullet passed through the fleshy part of the arm. She must have suffered pretty considerably, but she is as plucky as she is beautiful. She let me manipulate her arm and do what had to be done without wincing. Once when I looked at her I saw the tears rolling down her face, but she uttered no sound. A native woman would have screamed the place down. She is

lying on a couch in Miss Melville's room, wrapped in some sort of white arrangement, looking—well, I am an old fellow, but if I had been a young man I should have lost my heart to her; fortunately you did not see her! I suppose she kept her face well hidden beneath the saree?"

Sir Hubert was spared giving an answer, for at that very moment Horace Bracewell, accompanied by Shir Singh and old Baasha Singh, came riding up.

"The Ranee, sahib, what have you done with her?" exclaimed Shir Singh in tones of despair, as, dismounting, he and his companion salaamed to the ground, whilst Horace ascended the steps of the verandah.

"The princess is safe, under the care of two English ladies," answered Sir Hubert, rising. "You know she was badly wounded, and if I had not carried her off she would certainly have fallen into the hands of those rascals. Were they the Begum's people or only common Dacoïts?"

"Both, your honour; the Begum hired a band of Dacoïts to capture the princess. She had sent two of her own men to lead them. The sahib," he continued, salaaming to Horace, "slew one, and the other fled. Then our men swept down upon the Dacoïts, slaying and wounding several."

"What became of the princess's women?" asked Sir Hubert.

"As he could not fight, Baasha Singh stayed beside them. Their terror was great, but they survived. We put them in the palkis, the bearers returned, and they are now doubtless in the house at Delhi, weeping and moaning for their mistress, not knowing whether she be dead or alive."

"Then you can return and tell them she is alive, but too ill to be moved at present. Is it not so, Doctor?"

"Certainly," answered Dr. Batson, "it would be highly imprudent; she must be kept perfectly quiet."

"You hear," said Sir Hubert. "Send her own ayah out here. You need not look so scared, Shir Singh; I have done the best I could for her under the circumstances. She is with ladies, and will be well cared for. This is an honourable house. As soon as she is well enough to be removed, she will be conveyed to her own palace; at present it would endanger her life. To-morrow I shall take the papers with which Captain Nicholson entrusted me to the chief commissioner at Delhi, and he will decide what is to be done. By the by, do you suppose those fellows are likely to molest her again?"

"Not now," said Shir Singh. "Here, she is under British care; they will be afraid. Besides, the King of Delhi was friendly with Futtih Singh, and he will not suffer her to be molested."

"Very well; go to the city, and assure her people of her safety," said Sir Hubert.

The two men salaamed and departed.

Whilst Sir Hubert had been thus engaged, Ruby glided into the room, and any one who had caught the look of relief which came over her face when she saw Horace would have guessed at once that his chance of winning her was by no means hopeless. But her greeting was carelessly indifferent.

"Back again so soon, Horace!" she said. "Where are the tiger-skins you promised me?"

"You must wait for them until there is no forlorn maiden to rescue, Ruby," he answered, smiling.

Her tone changed, and she said seriously,—

"You have indeed had a strange adventure. Have you seen this girl? do you know who she is?"

"I have and have not seen her," he answered. "I caught sight for the space of a moment of a creature who might have been a being from another world, she was so

strangely, almost supernaturally beautiful. Her name is the Princess Azile."

"Beautiful," answered Ruby, in an awed tone, "she is divinely beautiful. I have left her sleeping, and she hardly looks as if she belonged to this earth—more like an angel resting. It is wonderful!"

"There is a superstition that she is 'heavenly born,'" said Horace. "What is meant by that I cannot say; she is the daughter of the late rajah, Futtih Singh."

"Did you say the colonel was at Meerut, Miss Melville?" asked Sir Hubert, breaking in upon the conversation.

"He was sent for quite suddenly by General Hewitt," answered Ruby, "to be present at the court-martial on the 25th. It seems that serious rumours are about of disaffection among the Sepoys. Father says it is ridiculous, that he will answer with his life for the fidelity of his own men. However, he is gone there with a company, but hopes it is only for a short time. He was just making arrangements for us to leave next week for Simla; now we shall remain here until his return. We have promised to be very good and to live like cloistered nuns," she added, looking up archly at Horace.

"That means we are to take our departure," he said, smiling.

"I am afraid it does," replied Ruby.

"But surely we may be permitted to come and inquire after the health of the princess," said Sir Hubert.

"In moderation," answered Ruby. "The doctor will report, but you see if you are here at all hours of the day the Griffs will follow in your wake, and Mrs. Grundy will be scandalised. We have promised father, and are bound to keep our word."

"In reason," said Horace.

"Yes, in reason," answered Ruby, smiling.

"Then we will take our departure at once," said Sir Hubert. "I shall be thankful for a bath and to get into clean clothes once more. I trust your father will not be offended at the liberty I have taken in bringing the princess here. I could not imagine what else to do with her."

"I am sure he will not mind at all," answered Ruby. "Kate and I are delighted. Good-bye, Doctor; you will come and see your patient again this evening," she said, addressing Batson.

"I will," he answered. "In the meantime, keep her room as cool and as quiet as possible."

Sir Hubert and he went away together, but Horace lingered behind.

"I am afraid, Ruby," he said in a low voice, "you will have to bear with me and let me remain in your neighbourhood. You see, I have tried absence twice, and each time it seems more intolerable than the last. I will not trouble you more than I can help, but I can't live without an occasional ray of sunshine."

"How foolish you are!" said Ruby impatiently. "I will endure your presence on one condition only."

"And that is?" asked Horace.

"That a word of four letters is never to be pronounced between us. I am quite serious. I will remain with my father until his time is up. He was fifteen years out here alone for my sake; it is only fair he should at last realise he has a daughter."

"And afterwards?" said Horace.

"Leave the future to take care of itself and be happy in the present," answered Ruby. "Adieu; I must go to my patient," and waving her hand she disappeared.

"Fortunately we are both young and can afford to wait—with hope," thought Horace, as he too left the bungalow.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A FIRST LOVE.

WHEN Adam awoke out of that long strange sleep, he was conscious of a change pervading his whole being. A subtle, undefined something had gone forth from him, he was no longer whole and complete in himself; and looking up he saw a woman, and knew that henceforth in her and by her alone existence could be perfect. Even so it is with each one of us at some epoch of our lives—an awakening of the finer essences of our being, the dawn of that divine mystery we call love.

As Sir Hubert Pennington lay on a couch in the dăk bungalow at Delhi, this same knowledge came to him, and he knew that henceforth the girl he had rescued from ignominy, perhaps from death, was the complement of his being, that without her his soul was barren.

It was a sudden revelation, and had come quickly upon him when he felt the beating of her heart against his own; and now there sprang up within him a joy, a power, a desire for life, such as he had never experienced before. For the first time he tasted of the elixir of life, and all that was immortal in his threefold nature of body, soul, and spirit awoke, and he was glad with a strange, undefined gladness.

After his long journey he was not weary; it had not appeared long to him; only since he had lost sight of her the minutes and hours had seemed to lag. He felt in

his bosom, and a smile flitted over his face. The dagger she had let fall he had secured as he lifted her from the ground, and it was there still, against his heart, a dangerous but dear companion, speaking to him of life, not of death.

So engrossed was he with his reflections that he failed to hear his servant enter, and was not aware of his presence until he stood close beside him, handing him a letter and saying,—

"Sahib, an old man waits without desiring speech with you. He says he belongs to the Princess Azile's household."

"Let him enter," said Sir Hubert, rousing himself regretfully, as when awakened from a pleasant dream we are forced back to the dull routine of daily life.

The man retired, and a few seconds later ushered in Baasha Singh.

"The gracious sahib will pardon his unworthy servant for intruding thus upon him, but time is pressing—I dare not delay. The rumour has got abroad, and has even reached the ears of the king and royal princes, that Futtih Singh's daughter has fallen into the hands of the British, that they are keeping her a prisoner, and will not suffer her to enter her own palace in the city. It is also known that 'the heavenly born' possesses great wealth, and the shazadahs* are anxious to get her into their power. The Queen Zeenat Mahal has sent to bid the Ranee welcome and to request her presence at the royal palace. When they heard that she had been attacked and wounded on her journey, and was now in a bungalow in the cantonment, the outcry was great. Shir Singh is even now at the palace explaining how this came to pass, and that her own women have gone out to attend upon her."

* King's sons.

Sir Hubert listened in silence to the old man; when he had finished, he said,—

"It is well. I will see to this matter at once. In the meantime let four Sikhs of the escort go to Colonel Melville's bungalow and remain there on guard. Let Shir Singh know I will meet him there."

The old man salaamed and went forth. Sir Hubert rose from his couch, and for a few minutes walked slowly up and down the room considering. Was it possible he was in love with this girl whom he had hardly seen? He reviewed his past, and smiled to think how indifferent he had been to woman-kind in general; and now suddenly the spell had fallen upon him, and he found himself yearning with a strange longing for the sight of a face he had seen only for a few seconds.

"It is madness," he said aloud; but he knew it was a madness of which he did not care to divest himself. She was unlike any one he had ever seen before; her charm lingered round him, and he vaguely wondered if it might not be that he had seen her before! There was such an ideality about her. "'Heaven born' they call her, and I almost think they are right," he murmured, and the handsome face grew strangely tender, while lip and eye smiled with that new-found gladness, the dawn of a great love. He drew himself up to his full height and called,—

"Qui-hai."*

His bearer answered, entering,—

"Sahib."

"Order my horse at once," said Sir Hubert.

The bearer salaamed and disappeared, and shortly after Sir Hubert, followed by his syce, was riding down the principal street of the city, called the Chandi-Chouk, or

* "Who is there?"

street of silver. It is one of the finest streets in India, being a mile long, and forming a sort of boulevard, with double rows of trees on either side, and a stone channel, through which water flows down the centre, thus dividing the traffic into two. The shops, or bazaars as they are familiarly called, are numerous and varied—shawl merchants and jewellers, sellers of sweetmeats, booths filled with shoes of coloured leather turned up at the toes, embroidered caps, native brass household utensils, and many other things; and not the least curious is the proprietor of these establishments squatting cross-legged in the midst of his wares, with his hookah between his lips.

Sir Hubert rode leisurely through the noisy, motley crowd, until suddenly a thought struck him, and stopping his horse he signed to his syce to approach.

"Do you know where the Rajah Futtih Singh's palace is situated?" he asked.

"Yes, sahib, in the great square near the Church of St. John, not far from the Kashmeer gate."

Though it was out of his way Sir Hubert turned his horse's head in that direction, and soon reached the square. He had no difficulty in recognising the house, because of the Sikhs on guard at the gate. It was a large, handsome building, standing far back from the road in a compound filled with shrubs, and judging from the exterior it represented well the enormous wealth of its owner.

"Guarded by native custom and her high rank she is virtually unapproachable," thought Sir Hubert. "I am a fool!" and with that comforting reflection he rode on. He had made up his mind that in the present emergency the fittest man to advise him was Sir Theophilus Metcalfe. His father before him had been an English functionary, thoroughly versed in Indian life, and the present Sir Theophilus was a magistrate of high standing. Beyond

the walls of Delhi he possessed a magnificent park of several acres, and a house which has become historically known as Metcalfe House. Thither Sir Hubert now rode, and dismounted at the foot of the marble steps leading to the principal entrance, the doors of which stood wide open, giving access to a magnificent hall. The khansamah with low salaams came forward to receive him.

"Is your master within?" asked Sir Hubert.

"If the honoured sahib will graciously step into the reception-room, I will inquire," answered Ali Beg; and he held back the purdah of costly damask for Sir Hubert to enter the saloon.

"Tell Sir Theophilus I will not detain him long, but my business is of importance," said Sir Hubert.

The khansamah once more salaamed and disappeared.

Five minutes later Sir Theophilus entered.

"I am very glad to see you, Sir Hubert," he said. "What good wind has blown you this way?" and he held out his hand cordially.

"A tiresome business," answered Sir Hubert, "and I think you are the only man I know able to judge the situation dispassionately; so I have come to you."

"Indeed! thank you for your good opinion. I will promise you to do my best. Sit down and tell me your story."

Sir Hubert did so, making it as short as possible.

"I knew Futtih Singh well," said Sir Theophilus. "He was a curious man; his death at the present moment is a great loss to us, he was so devoted to the British interest. Of his private life of course I knew nothing: we never do know anything of native domestic life. But your story reads like a page of romance. Your princess is a half-caste, of course."

"I think not," answered Sir Hubert. "The glimpse I

caught of her showed me a fair, white face with light hair and blue eyes."

"A Kashmeerian!" said Sir Theophilus; "but that is of no consequence. If she is legally Futtih Singh's heiress she is a person of great importance, owing to her wealth, which must be enormous. Of course her being left a ward to the British Government will raise great jealousy, and her being detained in a European bungalow is without precedent. You ought to have taken her straight to Delhi."

"I had only my own syce with me. I did not know in what part of the town Futtih Singh's palace happened to be. She was hurt, and I was only too thankful to get her under shelter, you understand," said Sir Hubert.

"Of course I do," replied Sir Theophilus, "but others will not. Cannot she go to Delhi to-night?"

"I think not. Batson seemed to consider her rather badly hurt, and that fever was likely to set in."

"Well, something must be done; I propose we should ride out to the bungalow, see the doctor, and arrange for her removal."

"If you think such a step necessary of course I shall be grateful to you," answered Sir Hubert.

"There is nothing to be grateful about," answered Sir Theophilus; "it is simply my duty. The native princes are irritated enough against us as it is, we cannot afford to excite them further, and they will be very angry at her being detained in an English household. I will order refreshments, and then we will ride out together."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FEARS.

THE heat was beginning to be intense. At midday the air seemed to quiver from the effect of heat and glare; the rays of the sun beat down pitilessly on the naked earth. The leaves of the trees looked dusty, and the sky was clouded with dust; all trace of green had disappeared, except where the mali laboured with the watering-hose night and morning in the bungalow gardens.

Ruby and Kate were simply overpowered; and though the punkahs worked by day and by night, and the bheestis squirted the water from their mussuks upon the matting of sweet-scented grass, on this particular day the two ladies were absolutely prostrate.

They understood now why Colonel Melville had been so anxious to get them off to the hills with Mrs. Roberts and her children. But Ruby had pleaded so hard to remain until her father could accompany them, that against his better judgment he had yielded. The unexpected summons to Meerut had further delayed their departure, and they must now wait his return.

"I declare the very breeze is hot," said Ruby, lifting herself languidly in her rocking-chair. "Oh dear! who can that possibly be coming now?" she added, as she heard the wheels of a dhoolie crossing the compound.

"It is visiting hour," said Kate, "and you may be sure we shall be besieged. The news that we have a native princess as guest will have aroused the curiosity of the whole cantonment. We had better get dressed."

At that moment, Jane, accompanied by their ayah, entered the room, and the sound of more wheels announcing fresh visitors obliged Ruby to follow Kate's advice.

They were soon dressed, and when they entered the drawing-room found a fairly large number of guests waiting for them, and every one on the tip-toe of expectation.

"I can tell you nothing about the princess," said Ruby, in answer to the hundred-and-one questions with which she was assailed. "Yes, I have seen her; she is quite fair—fairer than either I or Kate, and she is very beautiful. Her people are devoted to her; they call her the 'White Ranee.' There is a wicked old Begum who wants to kill her to get her money, and would have succeeded if Sir Hubert, like the knight he is, had not carried her off."

"But she is wounded. We hear you had to send for Dr. Batson," said one lady.

"Yes; the wicked Begum's people fired at her, and the shot hurt her arm, but it will be nothing serious, the doctor says, only she must be kept very quiet."

"But surely you will let us see her?" asked another guest.

"How can I commit such a breach of etiquette!" Ruby answered. "You all know the privacy to which native ladies are accustomed. Besides, I am responsible to Sir Hubert Pennington, who has charge of her until she is transferred as a ward of Government. I assure you I feel overpowered."

It required considerable strength of mind for Ruby to maintain her ground. Fortunately, Kate stood up man-

fully for her, and so by degrees the visitors, tired out and disappointed, dropped away grumbling to each other, "that really Ruby Melville took too much upon herself for so young a girl." When the last guest had disappeared, Ruby heaved a deep sigh.

"Oh, how horrid they have all been!" she exclaimed. "I never want to see one of them again. How hot it is! What would I not give for a good blow from our dear Surrey hills! I feel suffocated; and I don't know why it is, but I am horribly nervous. I feel just as if something dreadful were going to happen. I do wish father would come home," and involuntarily her eyes filled with tears.

"Nervous! that is very unlike you, Ruby," answered Kate. "Come out on to the verandah; it will be cooler there. The sun is not so hot now; it will be going down soon."

"I don't think it makes much difference," said Ruby. "The nights are if anything worse than the days. The early morning is the only time worth living. I am so tired," and stepping out on to the verandah she leant, almost fainting, against one of the pillars.

"It is the heat, and all those dreadful people," said Kate, fanning her; and calling a bearer, she told him to fetch some scent.

It was thus, a few minutes later, that Horace Bracewell found her.

"What has happened? are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

"No, I am not ill, only very tired, and I am afraid foolishly nervous," she answered with a short laugh. "We have had no end of people here worrying about the princess; it has been all Kate and I could do to keep their hands off her. Do you know," she added, turning to Kate, "I saw Mrs. Viney, the captain's wife, slip out of

the room. I followed her, for I suspected what she was after; she was already half-way down the passage asking one of the servants which was the princess's room. I had to request her to retrace her steps. Oh, how she did scowl at me!" And again there was that little nervous laugh which almost alarmed Horace.

"Women are horrid when their curiosity is excited and remains unsatisfied," he remarked; "but sit down—you do not look fit to stand," and he pushed a chair towards her.

"It is very foolish," she said, sinking into it. "Kate dear, do tell Najaf we will dine here on the verandah. At least there is just a breath of air here; indoors it is unbearable."

The khansamah had heard the order, and, salaaming, said,—

"Do not let the Missy Sahib trouble herself; it will be done as she desires."

"Horace, stay and have dinner with us," said Ruby. "I am utterly demoralised; tell me something funny to cheer me up."

"You are already over-excited," he answered, looking anxiously at the crimson spot on her cheek. "We shall be having you down with fever if you are not soon off to the hills!"

"We cannot go till my father comes back," she answered. "You see we are new hands, and should not know how to set about travelling in this country, and father does not like any outsider to interfere. He will soon be home now. Have you nothing to tell us, Horace?" she added with nervous impatience.

"The mail came in this morning and brought me a letter from home; would you like to hear it?"

"Why, of course we should," both she and Kate ex-

claimed together; Ruby adding, "Home news is always welcome."

Horace unfolded his letter, and was just beginning to read it, when once more there were sounds of horses' feet, and Sir Theophilus and Sir Hubert entered the compound.

"Oh, what has happened now?" exclaimed Ruby in an affrighted tone and springing up from her seat.

"Why should anything particular have happened?" said Horace soothingly. "It is probably some business about the princess; Sir Theophilus is a magistrate. Why, Ruby, I never thought you were a fine lady with nerves; what has come over you?"

The young girl looked at him almost sadly.

"I wish I knew myself," she said, speaking slowly. "I am frightened."

There was no time for Horace to answer her, but he watched her as she went forward to receive Sir Theophilus; then turning to Kate he said sharply, "I hope she is not ill? but she is certainly not like herself."

"I trust, Miss Melville, you will excuse my intruding upon you in the colonel's absence," said Sir Theophilus; "but I have thought it advisable to ascertain whether the princess cannot be removed to her own palace to-night; it would be desirable for many reasons."

Kate, after her remark about Ruby, had gone into the house. She now returned just in time to hear Sir Theophilus' last words.

"I am afraid that is quite impossible," she said. "I have just seen Jane, and she says the princess is worse, restless with high fever; she thinks the doctor ought to be sent for."

"Then that settles the question," said Sir Theophilus; "it would be a worse catastrophe if she died on our hands."

"Oh, how can you say such dreadful things?" exclaimed

Ruby. "She must not, she cannot die," and turning to the khansamah she gave the order that the doctor should be sent for at once.

"Dinner is ready," announced that very stately personage.

"You will remain, I hope," said Ruby to Sir Theophilus, hesitating between a sense of propriety and the open-house hospitality she was accustomed to see her father dispense. Sir Theophilus' answer relieved her greatly.

"Thanks, Miss Melville, but I am expected at home; besides, I must smooth down the native susceptibilities concerning the princess. We are in bad odour as it is, and they are ready to misinterpret every action which is not quite to their liking. Tact goes a long way. Are you coming back with me, Sir Hubert?" he added.

A glance from Ruby caused Sir Hubert to answer,—

"I think not, if you will excuse me. I shall remain to see Doctor Batson; if he considers the princess can be removed to-morrow morning I will ride over to you the first thing."

"Very good," said Sir Theophilus, and his horse being brought round he took his leave and rode away.

Then the four friends—for such they really were—sat down to dinner, a *partie carrée.*

"Well, are you feeling better, Ruby?" asked Horace, after the first course.

"Oh yes, I'm all right," said Ruby. "I was simply worn out; the cawing of the crows is nothing to what we have had to endure in the way of chatter this afternoon. Sir Hubert, we have been subject to an invasion; you owe us a debt of gratitude for protecting your princess."

"Which I will do my best to repay," he answered, "if you will tell me how."

"I will consider the matter," said Ruby, smiling.

Dinner was over, and the party had stepped down from the verandah into the garden, in the vain hope of thus getting a little more air. The khansamah had placed tables with iced water and fruits for the ladies, cigars and coffee for the two gentlemen; the moon was just rising—altogether it was a pleasant, inviting scene.

"Sir Theophilus takes a very sombre view of the state of affairs," said Sir Hubert, addressing himself to Horace. "He declares the Sepoys will never get over this affair of the cartridges, that they are ripe for mutiny, that the bazaars are full of the most exaggerated reports concerning the war with Persia. Russia is said to be ready to place immense resources at the Shah's disposal. The Emperor of France and the Sultan of Turkey will also side with Persia; in fact, the whole world is about to pounce down upon us and snatch India from our grasp, and all this in fulfilment of prophecy. In yesterday's native paper there was a quotation from the revered Saint Shah Manal-Ullah —the original is in verse, but this is the text:—

"'After the fire-worshippers and Christians shall have held sway over the whole of Hindustan for a hundred years, and when injustice and apprehension shall prevail in their government, an Arab prince shall be born, who will ride forth triumphantly to slay them.'"

"And you mean to say Sir Theophilus believes all that bosh?" said Horace.

"To a certain extent he most certainly does," answered Sir Hubert. "He says the palace of Delhi is a nest of intrigue. It seems that Hasan Askari, the Mohammedan priest who dwells near the Delhi gate of the palace, has entered upon a propitiatory course of ceremonies every night before sunset, to insure the arrival of the Persians and the destruction of the Christians."

Ruby and Kate had been listening in silence to the conversation, and Horace had noticed what an almost wild look of fear had been gradually creeping over Ruby's face; he rose, making a quick sign to Sir Hubert to stop, but as he did so an exclamation involuntarily escaped him, for it seemed to him he saw an apparition.

"What is it?" exclaimed Ruby, starting up; and then they all turned and looked towards the house.

A tall, white-robed figure was standing on the steps of the verandah; the moon was now at its full, and the silvery light shone down upon her, producing an almost luminous effect. So strange was it that the coolies and native servants fled affrighted, persuaded it was a spirit.

The sheen of silver and pearls with which her white robe was covered glistened in the changeful rays, but it was the ethereally beautiful face which rivetted all eyes.

Sir Hubert did not need Ruby's half-terrified "It is the princess"; his heart knew her well. Horace Bracewell also recognised the face he had seen the night before under the dăk-tree; but it was no longer pale—two crimson spots glowed on either cheek, her eyes glistened with fever; strange, too, her head was uncovered, and the light feathery hair formed as it were an aureole around it.

All day long doves had been hovering round the bungalow, and now came fluttering down to her feet; but she heeded them not—she stood there smiling, even as she had stood on the steps of her own marble palace of Amritzir. Suddenly, in a voice pure and fresh like rippling water, she sang a little Indian love-song, tender and sweet; her hands were folded across her bosom, her head raised, and the large, clear blue eyes gazed upwards towards the starlit heavens.

Truly she might have been "heaven born," so little of

earth seemed to cling about her. No marvel if Sir Hubert bowed his head in love's homage.

It has taken long to tell, but the vision had lasted a few minutes only when Rhookia and Jane appeared. The former hastily threw a veil over her, and would have led her away, but she resisted gently, ceasing her song and saying plaintively in her soft, native dialect,—

"Let me breathe the night air, Rhookia; it is soft and balmy." But Ruby was already beside her, and taking her hand said, "You shall do just as you like; come," and to Rhookia's horror she led her down the steps and round the garden walk until they reached the verandah again. Only for one second the princess paused before Sir Hubert, lifted her eyes to him, then, as if quite satisfied, went down the passages to her room, and laid herself on a couch and fell asleep.

Kate and Ruby, who had followed, watched her for a few minutes, and then returned to the two young men.

"I am almost sorry I sent for Dr. Batson," said Ruby. "Jane says she has no fever now, and she is sleeping peacefully; there is no cause for anxiety."

"Then we will take our departure," said Horace, "and let you rest. I am sure you need it."

"Yes, I am very tired," said Ruby; "it has been an exciting day."

The horses were brought round, and shaking hands with the two girls the young men rode leisurely back to Delhi.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### LOVE'S POWER.

DOCTOR BATSON was absent when the messenger from the Melvilles' bungalow reached his home, and it was nearly dawn before he returned.

"If it had been anything very serious they would have sent for me again," he argued; "as they have not done so I will take a short rest before disturbing them." And he consequently went to bed.

By six o'clock, however, he was at the bungalow, and was surprised to find the young ladies had not yet risen.

"Miss Ruby and Miss Clifford were both very tired last night," said Jane, who received him. "They went late to bed after an exciting day, so I have not allowed them to be disturbed. I am glad you have come early, sir, for I am not satisfied about the princess."

She told him what had happened the previous evening, adding,—

"When she reached Miss Ruby's room, which had been given up to her, she walked straight to the couch, laid herself down, gave a little sigh, much as a tired child would do, and apparently fell asleep. Since then she has not stirred; her ayah has watched beside her all night. I have gone in and out, but nothing rouses her; she is still sleeping. I do not at all like her appearance."

"I will go and see her at once," said Dr. Batson.

A few minutes later he was standing beside a couch upon which the princess lay. A soft white cashmere shawl had been thrown over her, the flush of fever had left her face, the delicate features were as if carved in alabaster. Except for the gentle heaving of her bosom it would have been impossible to detect any sign of life.

The doctor raised the hand that lay on the outside of the shawl and felt the pulse, then he lifted the eyelids, and last of all he listened for the beating of that young heart.

"How long has she been like this?" he asked Jane.

"Since ten o'clock last night," she answered.

"I can do nothing," said the doctor; "she has fallen into a lethargic trance. It is a case of extreme nervous excitement. Nature must take her course; if I were to attempt to rouse her, she would probably die or go mad. Let her remain perfectly quiet, and keep the room as cool as you can. You had better put ice-bags on her head, and from time to time moisten her lips with milk; that is all. I will return in a few hours. It would be well for you to keep what I have told you quiet for the present," he added.

"And her injured arm?" said Jane.

"I will dress it. You have of course kept it cool with wet cloths."

Turning to Rhookia, who was watching him anxiously, he told her that her mistress was sleeping, that the fever was over, and that she would probably awake quite well. This seemed to satisfy her, and she allowed him to dress the wound, which he did without the princess giving any sign of waking; then with a few final instructions to Jane he was leaving the room, when Ruby entered.

"Well, Doctor, how do you find the princess?" she asked.

"Sleeping, my dear young lady; and I should prefer no one but her ayah and Jane to come into the room."

"You are not anxious about her?" asked Ruby.

"No, but this sleep must not be disturbed, even though it lasts longer than seems natural. Have you heard from your father? is he coming home?"

"A messenger has just arrived," answered Ruby, as she followed the doctor down the passage, rather surprised by the abruptness of his manner. "He will not be home for another ten days. You know that the men of Colonel Smyth's regiment who refused to take the cartridges are to be tried by court-martial, and General Hewitt has asked father to be present."

"Oh! indeed," said the doctor; "I am sorry for it. I am afraid they will have trouble. I understand General Anson has given orders that the sentence, whatever it may be, is to be carried out; there is to be no compromise. Of course he is perfectly right; there has been far too much shilly-shallying already. Still, I wish your father were at home."

"So do I," said Ruby.

Two beautiful horses were led up to the verandah steps, and at the same time Kate made her appearance. As she shook hands and wished the doctor "good-morning," she naturally inquired after his patient, and received the same answer.

"She is sleeping, and must be kept quiet."

As the doctor helped them to mount, he remarked,—

"You are starting late; you will not go far—the day threatens to be very hot."

"Yes," said Ruby, "I am so sorry we overslept ourselves, but we will make amends to-morrow, eh, Kate? Good-bye, Doctor."

"Good-bye, ladies; enjoy yourselves."

He watched them ride away. When they had disappeared, instead of leaving at once he began slowly walking up and down the verandah.

"It would be awkward for those two young things if anything were to happen to that beautiful creature, and there seems nobody with any authority about her."

As he made this reflection Sir Hubert Pennington rode up; seeing the doctor, he asked hastily,—

"Is the princess worse?"

"No, but I am glad you have come."

Sir Hubert, already alarmed by the doctor's manner, repeated anxiously as he dismounted,—

"What has happened? is she worse?"

"I hope not," answered the doctor, leading the way into the drawing-room. "The princess, on retiring to her room last night, fell into what the ayah and Jane thought was a quiet sleep; as a matter of fact she is in a trance. How long it may last I cannot say, possibly several days. It is the effect of a nervous shock, and we can do nothing but wait patiently for a change. She is young and in perfect health, her pulse is at present good, and the beating of her heart regular, but the brain has ceased to act; she is asleep."

Even while the doctor was speaking, the purdah was suddenly pushed on one side, and the same white figure which had appeared on the verandah the previous evening entered the room, followed closely by Jane and Rhookia.

The eyes were wide open, and the lips smiling. The doctor saw at a glance that she was unconscious; he raised his hand.

"Let no one move or speak," he said in a low voice. He was obeyed.

Then the princess stretched out her left arm—the right one being in a sling—and slowly, as a blind person feeling

her way, she went straight across the room to where Hubert stood.

To him the moment was one of mingled pain and joy. He did not speak or move, only he looked into her eyes.

"Were they really sightless?" he asked himself; "they were so beautiful!"

Suddenly the princess's head drooped, and with a faint cry she fell to the ground at his feet.

In a second Rhookia was beside her, and would have raised her in her arms and carried her away, but the doctor gently pushed her on one side, and said authoritatively to Sir Hubert,—

"Speak to her, call her by her name."

"Princess," said Sir Hubert, steadying his voice with an effort, and bending over her, "will you not rise? it is not fitting that you should lie there."

At the first words the beautiful head was lifted, and those present saw a faint rosy tint suffuse the till then pale face, an expression as if she were listening; a flash of light came into her eyes whilst Sir Hubert was speaking, but died out when he ceased.

"Speak to her again," said the doctor.

The scene was growing intensely painful, especially to Sir Hubert. No one would ever know the restraint he exercised over himself at that moment, he who would so gladly have taken her in his arms and hidden her from those who now gazed upon her in her hour of weakness. Bending down, he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and felt the thrill which ran through the girlish figure at his touch.

"Princess Azile," he said, "will you not awake and speak to us?"

She rose instantly, drew herself up, and passed her hand over her brow, as if she were clearing away a mist.

Then she lifted her eyes until they met Sir Hubert's, her whole face became suffused with a delicate rose-leaf hue, and the lids dropped once more, whilst great heavy tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Nay, Princess, I beseech of you, do not weep," said Sir Hubert, his whole soul moved at the sight. "Doctor, can you do nothing for her?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Nature is doing her work better than I can," he answered. "Those tears will save her."

He signed to Rhookia to approach; the ayah obeyed, spoke a few caressing words to the princess, and took her by the hand to lead her away. This time Azile made no resistance—she was conscious—and suffered Rhookia to draw the veil, which had fallen back, over her face; she did not even glance back as she left the room, only she trembled like a leaf as she reached Sir Hubert, who had hastened forward to hold the purdah back for them to pass.

"Princess," he said, so low that the words reached her ear alone, "we shall meet again before long. Have no fear." Then he dropped the curtain, and, turning back into the room, faced the doctor.

Neither of them spoke for a few seconds, then the doctor said,—

"It is the clearest case of hypnotism I have ever witnessed."

"You may call it what you will," retorted Sir Hubert sharply; "but after what has happened I am bound to tell you that I love the princess. A year ago I saw her for the first time—a mere glimpse of her face as the wind blew the silken curtains of her howdah on one side—but I never forgot her, and the night before last, when I saw her again, I knew——" he paused, then added quickly, "that her image was graven in my heart."

"But it is madness, the thing is impossible; surely you have not spoken to the princess?" said the doctor.

"No, of course not," replied Sir Hubert. "She would not even have understood me. Still, you allow there is an affinity between us which draws her towards me. I have used no occult power, I only love and desire her, and she is drawn towards me; she does not even know what she feels—the word 'love' has to her no meaning. It is truly marvellous; she loves me without knowing it, and I—I worship her."

He spoke the last words with such quiet, concentrated passion that the doctor looked up in surprise; he was a man of the world, and had seen love's tragedy played out in all its different phases, but he had never seen anything like this.

"What do you intend doing?" he asked.

Sir Hubert laughed, such a triumphant, almost reckless, laugh.

"How do I know? I have not had time to think," he answered. "Why, Doctor, it is scarcely half an hour ago, as I was riding here, I was wondering how I could approach the princess, how I could possibly win her. You know the rest—she came to me, the spirit leading the frail earthly tenement, love guiding her. *You* call it by a scientific name: I say it is nature; her spirit and mine have been seeking each other—who shall say how long, in what far-off other world than this our little planet? We have met at last and recognised each other; now who shall part us?"

"You are mad, quite mad," said the doctor; but he did not smile—he looked anxious.

Again Sir Hubert laughed.

"As the world goes, lovers and poets are never considered sane," he said. "It is a sweet madness, at any rate, from which I do not care to awaken. Only, for the

present, Doctor, I would ask you to keep my secret. You have surprised it; it is scarcely yours, and, as you know, there are difficulties to be overcome."

"I should rather think so, if you contemplate making the princess your wife. Her people, your own people, every one will be against you."

"It matters little as long as she and I are of one mind," answered Sir Hubert, with that perfect assurance born of a sense of power; and truly he felt at that moment as if there were no barriers between himself and his love which he was not strong enough to break down.

"I see that to argue with you in your present state would be waste of time and breath," said the doctor; "only I beg of you to be careful and not to act precipitately. She is a great heiress, and the fact that the rajah has placed her under British protection will naturally give offence to the high-class natives. If, therefore, it gets abroad that an English officer is seeking to marry her, it will make no end of mischief."

"I will remember what you say," answered Sir Hubert. "At the present moment all is so new to me. In ten days, at the latest, I shall be leaving Delhi to join John Nicholson, so that, with care, perfect secrecy can, for the present, be maintained. I shall take no definite steps until I have consulted Nicholson."

"Very good," said the doctor; "you may be sure I shall not betray you. Now good-bye and good luck, though I am still of opinion that you are not quite in your right mind. The only excuse I can make for you is that such beauty is enough to turn any man's brain."

Having said which, the two men shook hands and the doctor took his departure.

It was now nearly eight o'clock, but Sir Hubert settled himself in a lounge, determined to await Ruby's return.

"If no one else knows, she must," was his first reflection.

They had always been such good friends, and now his heart went out to Ruby.

"She will help us," he thought.

He had not long to wait before the welcome sound of horses' feet announced the return of the riders. He rose, went out, and was just in time to help them dismount.

"Oh! Sir Hubert, we met Dr. Batson, and he told us the princess has awakened and is quite well. I am so glad."

"Yes, she is quite well, but I wish you would go and see her at once," he answered.

"As soon as I have changed my habit. Oh! it is so hot, much too hot to ride even now. We must start earlier to-morrow, Kate."

"Yes, we must indeed," answered Kate, and she disappeared into the house.

"You will remain for chota hazree?" said Ruby to Sir Hubert.

"If you will let me," he answered; "the fact is, I want to talk to you."

She looked up at him surprised. He smiled.

"We are friends, Ruby," he said. "Horace Bracewell can well allow that much."

"Yes, we are friends," she answered, smiling back. "Horace Bracewell has nothing to do in the matter. Wait for me; I will be back almost directly."

And she ran away down the passage.

Sir Hubert returned to the drawing-room, and he stood dreamily waiting at the glass door leading on to the verandah, until Ruby should reappear.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A MUTUAL CONFESSION.

"OH, you beautiful creature!" exclaimed Ruby, and involuntarily, without reflecting, without one moment's hesitation, she threw her arms round the princess, who stood in the middle of her room clad in some sort of silvery material; strings of pearls encircled her neck, and were entwined with the long, plaited tresses falling far below her waist.

"You beautiful creature!" repeated Ruby, and drawing her still closer to her she kissed her lips. "I love you! I wonder why I love you so!" and still holding her she gazed intently into her face.

The effect on Azile of that spontaneous caress was magical. It was her first kiss given and received.* In all her life no human lips had ever touched hers, no encircling arms had ever held her in love's bondage; and now there welled up within her a flood of responsive love which transformed her. Ruby had given her one kiss, but she showered them back upon her, kissing her brow, her hair, her hands, with a passion which was almost hurtful, cooing over her as her doves cooed, and repeating her own words, "I love you, I love you." And so entwined in each other's arms they clung together, overcome by an indescribable emotion.

* The Indians do not kiss as a sign of affection.

"You shall never leave me, never," said Ruby; "you poor, forsaken darling! I have no sister; let us be sisters!"

Something of what she said Azile understood, and answered in her own tongue.

"Ha,* I will be what you make me."

They were such contrasts, Ruby with her bright fresh colouring and dark eyes, and Azile's transparent whiteness and blue forget-me-not eyes.

"Miss Ruby, breakfast is waiting and you have not yet changed your habit," said Jane, coming in. "Oh dear! what has happened now?" she exclaimed, seeing the two girls in such close proximity to each other.

"Nothing has happened, Jane," answered Ruby, "only the princess and I"—and she passed her hand caressingly over the fair head—"have found out that we are likely to be great friends." She rose as she spoke, and taking Azile's hand said, "Come with me into my room while I dress."

"Well, I never!" said Jane as the curtain dropped behind them. "She's just bewitched the whole household. I don't half like it; and that black woman a-staring and a-jabbering. I wish the master would come home; these young things have no business to be left to go their own gait—mischief will come of it as sure as my name's Jane Carter."

The curtain was once more drawn on one side, and Ruby, having hastily donned a white morning gown, came back into the room with Azile.

"Well," she was saying, "if you will not come with me, I will come back to you as soon as chota hazree is over. But you must eat to-day; you touched nothing yesterday," and taking a bunch of ripe bananas from a basket, she held them up to her.

* Yes.

Azile smiled.

"Yes, I will eat," she said; and taking the fruit she handed it to Rhookia, who with deft fingers stripped off the outer rind and gave it back to her.

Ruby smiled, satisfied as she turned away, thinking,—

"After all, though she is a princess she is only a child! How sweet she is!"

"Well, Ruby, we thought you were never coming!" exclaimed Kate, as she made her appearance in the breakfast-room.

"I have been with the princess," answered Ruby. "Except for her poor arm, she seems quite well this morning, and she is so beautiful."

"She has bewitched you," said Kate, looking across the table at her. "I am glad she is going back to her own palace to-day."

"Why are you glad, Kate? I think it very unkind of you. Fancy a poor young thing like that all alone!"

Kate laughed.

"I would pity her!" she said. "Why, she has never known anything different all her life; for her sake let us hope she never may, for after all a palace is a palace, and our ayah was telling me that she is enormously rich, and has scores of servants at her beck and call. Why, those pearls she wears are a fortune in themselves."

"And in your opinion that constitutes happiness. Oh, Kate!" said Ruby reproachfully.

The one point in Kate's character which always ruffled Ruby was this desire for wealth, the ever-recurring assertion that it was the source of happiness, the one great thing needful in the world to which everything else was subordinate.

"It is no use discussing the point, we shall never agree," said Kate. "I know from experience that nothing can be

done in this world without money, either for good or evil. You two have no experience; everything has come to you; therefore you do not half appreciate your blessings, because you have never been without them. But it is mail day, and I have not written my letters. Excuse me, I must be off," and she left the room.

"I am so sorry when Kate is bitter like that. I tell her she does not appreciate her blessings. She has so many to love her. I had only grannie and father; now I have only father."

"And I have not a creature in the world to care whether I am dead or alive," said Sir Hubert. "I forgot—I have a second cousin, who, if I die without direct heirs, will come in for the title and property. I do not think he would grieve much at my demise."

"Oh, don't!" said Ruby. "How nasty you make people out! What you say is as bad as what Kate said just now."

"I am sorry, but I am afraid it is the way of the world," answered Sir Hubert; "but let the subject drop; I have something of far more consequence to discuss with you."

"Then come on to the verandah. How hot it is already! I am sure that wretched coolie is asleep again. Qui hai?"

"Missy Sahib," answered a white-robed, white-turbanned bearer, coming forward.

"The punkah is not going at all; see to it at once," said Ruby; and then she turned to Hubert.

"Before you tell me anything, I want to ask you one question," she said. "Must the princess go back to her palace at once? Cannot she remain a few days longer with me?"

"I am afraid not; if Dr. Batson pronounces her well enough she must go. Sir Theophilus says her residence here is an offence to native usages and quite unprecedented,"

replied Sir Hubert. "Great umbrage has already been given by the fact of her being placed under British protection, and just now the native mind is very sensitive on religious subjects; and though as a woman it is of less consequence, they would in the princess's case resent any interference."

Ruby pondered for a minute; then she said,—

"I cannot in the least account for it, but from the first moment I saw the princess I loved her. It may be her beauty charmed me, but I think it is rather an undefined sympathy between us. Kate Clifford has always been my friend and companion, but we do not always agree. It is quite a different feeling between the princess and me; we are drawn towards each other, and the thought of parting is pain and grief to me;" and Ruby's eyes filled with tears.

"I understand you very well," answered Sir Hubert. "I was going to make a very similar confession. I, too, love the princess, and have always loved her from the first moment I caught sight of her face. I do not attempt to explain it, except by the theory of affinity. I have hardly seen her, we know nothing of each other, and yet I feel that the whole happiness of my life is in her hands. What can I do? how can I ever approach her? Ruby, help me."

"I wish I could," answered Ruby seriously, "but I am sure I do not know how."

"You can go to her, you can be with her, and so you can guide and help her, and in time—who knows?"

"I can do, I am doing that," answered Ruby; "for do you know I am more and more persuaded she has no Indian blood in her veins; she is an English girl, and must have been stolen when a baby."

"That is my opinion," answered Sir Hubert. "But we have no proofs. Captain Nicholson has the rajah's

version, which, though perfectly absurd, must be accepted. She is his adopted daughter. He has left her his wealth; she is therefore a person of importance, and the native rajahs will before long be suing for her hand. Ruby, you do not know, thank God, the life to which this would condemn her!"

"I will take your word for it," said Ruby, "and will serve both you and her to the best of my ability. You cannot imagine how sweet she is; but you can never see her, she will never learn to care for you."

"Say love at once, Ruby; it is the only right word," answered Sir Hubert. "Love is truly a very wonderful thing; I had no idea how wonderful till now, because I have never thought much about it; but I believe Azile knows I love her, and she in her way loves me."

"How can you imagine such a thing?" said Ruby, looking at him with astonishment. "It is impossible."

"I do not mean to say she knows she loves me," answered Sir Hubert; "with her it is as yet only an undeveloped instinct, and has no name; a seed which has fallen on virgin soil and must grow and ripen into maturity, but it must be nurtured or it will die."

"And I am to nurture it?" said Ruby, smiling.

"If you will," he answered, "by opening her soul, by teaching her what you know yourself, Ruby, to be most worth living for, now and for eternity. Hers is such a delicately organised nature the slightest influence will leave its mark upon her; she is strangely impressionable. You know how she came out to us last night when I was with you. Well, this morning, when I arrived at the bungalow, it was the same thing; she came straight to where I was. Dr. Batson calls it hypnotism, which means that I have a magnetic power over her spirit, strong enough to draw her to me when and where I will. It is quite

true, I do desire and love her with all the strength of my being, and this morning I did long inordinately for a sight of her. Whether this really affected her, I am not prepared to say, but certain it is that unconsciously she came to me, and when I touched her and spoke to her she awoke out of her trance."

Ruby did not answer—she was wondering. She knew Horace loved her, and she loved him in an easy, comfortable way; but the development of this unknown phase of the tender passion struck her as strange and marvellous. She had yet to learn that there are many gradations in love, even as there are flowers more perfect one than another.

"For when they shall rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven." The twofold nature, not the threefold, will then meet, purified from earthly passion; the mortal will have put on immortality.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Ruby, rousing herself.

"What I have told you," said Sir Hubert; "be with her as much as you can; teach her all you know. She cannot have a kinder, more loving teacher."

Ruby looked up at him.

"You do not know her," she said; "she is stronger and better than I am; but——"

She could not finish, the khansamah announced that the sahib's horse was waiting, and Sir Hubert rose and took leave of his confidante, saying,—

"I trust you and thank you."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A DIFFICULT POSITION.

"DEAREST, I will come to you to-morrow at dawn; you may trust me," Ruby said, holding the princess's hand, as Rhookia enveloped her in the saree which was to conceal her form and features from all beholders.

In the compound of the Melville bungalow several palkis with native attendants were waiting to take the princess and her women to her residence in Delhi.

Two days had passed since the events we related in our last chapter, and though the princess's arm was not yet healed, she was otherwise in perfect health.

The King of Delhi, at the instigation of his queen, Zeenat Mahal Begum, sent his own physician to see her, Hakim Assam-Ullah. Closely veiled, the princess had received him in the presence of her governess Tulsa, Rhookia, and other female attendants. She answered his questions, but would not allow him to examine her arm, merely assuring him that she was not detained against her will, and that on the morrow it was her intention to enter her palace; but she begged the queen to excuse her either visiting or receiving visitors, as she was mourning for her father, and her health had suffered from her late accident.

Hakim Assam-Ullah returned to Delhi, without having seen so much as the princess's hand. He informed the king that the story of her being white was probably exaggerated, that she spoke the north-western dialect, and

the purest Hindustanee, as only a native could, that she was utterly ignorant concerning her fortune and position, that she was ruled by her governess Tulsa, and Baasha Singh, an old man, her preceptor, and they had assured him that, once she was removed to Delhi, she would hold no further communication with the Feringhees. It had therefore been decided by Sir Theophilus Metcalfe, as magistrate, that the princess should be conveyed to Delhi the following day, greatly to Ruby's sorrow. It was wonderful how during those few days of close intimacy Azile had learnt to understand and even speak English—in broken words, truly, but still comprehensibly. It had been necessary to propitiate Tulsa, who had, at first, resented Ruby's continual presence beside the princess, but a few rich gifts from Azile, and less costly, but being of English origin of even more value in her eyes, from Ruby, satisfied her.

"My white doves shall bring you my greeting to-morrow before the dawn. At sunrise and at sunset they shall visit you. Now farewell, my beloved;" and the princess, surrounded by her people, was conducted to her palki.

As she had said, so it came to pass—twice daily a pair of white doves flew from the palace at Delhi to the Melville bungalow, and each time they bore in their beaks a large white pearl. They settled on the ledge of the window of Ruby's room, and suffered her to caress them, dropping the pearl into her hand; then they flew back homewards.

Colonel Melville being still absent, Ruby went daily to Delhi, and often remained till sunset on the roof of the palace or in the princess's private apartments.

Baasha Singh was always present, also Tulsa, working at some rich embroidery, and the former listened with intense interest whilst Ruby taught the princess not only English, but the story of the Christ.

The old man would ask questions and discuss with Ruby, telling her much concerning the religion of the East, and she procured translations of the Old and New Testaments, and herself made wonderful progress in her knowledge of Hindustanee and many other things.

The munshi would smile when she appeared, and show her a pile of old musty books, which he had unearthed, no one knew whence. So the days and hours passed, and Ruby thought she had never been happier in her life. Azile's quick intellect, so fresh and untired, astonished her.

"She never forgets anything; I have never to tell her a thing twice over," she said to Sir Hubert, when he came out to spend the evening at the bungalow for the last time before leaving for Lahore.

"Ruby, I believe you think of no one but that princess," said Kate impatiently; "I am tired to death of her very name. I wonder, Horace, you are not jealous!"

"Perhaps I am," he answered, "but it does not always do to show our feelings. The princess is a new plaything."

"That is too bad," exclaimed Ruby; "she is no plaything at all; she is simply the cleverest, most lovable creature I have ever known. If I am teaching her, I am learning much myself, and I am very happy. I never was happier."

"There is no accounting for tastes," said Kate, shrugging her shoulders. "I have been twice to the palace, and have had quite enough of it, and I really think, Ruby, you need not go quite so often. Mrs. Viney was saying to-day that no one ever saw you now, and that people were beginning to talk."

"I am sure I do not care," answered Ruby passionately; "she is a horrid, spiteful gossip. No one except my

father shall prevent my going to the palace, and I do not believe he would. You are happy enough, Kate, with the Vineys and Wilsons; you do not want me."

"I am not speaking on my own account," answered Kate, "but it does seem absurd that you should throw every one over for a girl who must, sooner or later, marry a native rajah and be shut up in a zenana."

Ruby turned deadly white.

"It is horrible," she said, looking at Sir Hubert; "I cannot understand your speaking so coldly, Kate. If I could only save her from such a future!"

"You cannot; you will only get yourself into trouble. Sir Theophilus was telling Horace so yesterday."

"And you are looking far from well, Ruby," said Horace. "The hot weather is trying you, and these continual journeys to and fro are bad for you."

"I am perfectly well," answered Ruby. "You and Kate have been putting your heads together to find fault. Father wrote in his letter yesterday that he hoped to be back by the 12th, as soon as that horrid court-martial is over, and that we must be ready to start for Simla immediately. He has written to secure rooms for us; this is the 9th, so until I leave I shall certainly be as much as possible with the princess."

To prevent any further remarks she rose and strolled down the steps into the compound. In a few minutes she was joined by Sir Hubert.

"I am afraid you are getting yourself into trouble on my account," he said.

"Not at all," answered Ruby. "I can honestly say you have nothing to do with my comings and goings. I cannot explain my feelings, I do not understand them myself, but I am drawn towards Azile; I cannot stay away from her. By the by, I told her you were leaving

to-morrow, and she sent you this as a remembrance of your having saved her life."

Ruby held out a gold ring with three large diamonds of the purest water.

"I cannot accept such a costly gift," he answered; "you must take it back and tell her so."

"That I will not do," answered Ruby; "it is of no value to her, she has jewels enough for a king's ransom—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, pearls, set and unset. She offered me a handful to-day; of course I did not take them; but she chose this for you. It would be ungracious to refuse it; she would not understand the reason."

"Then give her this in return," said Sir Hubert, taking a hoop of pearls from his watch-chain; "tell her it was my mother's, *that* is its *only* value. I do not know when I shall see either you or her again," he added, "but I have faith. I shall try through Nicholson to get an appointment in or near Delhi by the end of the year. I wish I could have remained until your father's return from Meerut. I do not like leaving you comparatively alone here; for, though I do not believe there is any real cause for alarm, there are strange rumours abroad, and the atmosphere is by no means clear."

"Old Baasha Singh said a very queer thing yesterday," Ruby remarked.

"What did he say?" asked Sir Hubert.

"'It is well to have dark eyes; the blue eyes of the Feringhees have grown hateful to our people.' I observed," continued Ruby, "that the princess had blue eyes. 'True, but she is heavenly born,' he answered. 'No one can touch her; she is Futtih Singh's daughter. Besides, her face is hidden from strangers; but you lift your unveiled eyes to the sun.'"

"It was a strange speech," said Sir Hubert thoughtfully; but he hastened to change the conversation.

In the meantime, Kate and Horace were left to entertain each other; the former was thoroughly vexed, and remarked carelessly,—

"I think unless you take care your journey will be thrown away; those two are growing more intimate every day, and they do not attempt to hide it."

Horace smiled.

"It is all right, Kate; you need not trouble; I can read between the lines."

"Oh! if you are satisfied it is no affair of mine; you can take care of your own interests," she answered.

"I am not satisfied in the real sense of the word," he said, "because as things are at present I hardly see anything of Ruby; but you must remember there is no engagement between us; we are both free."

"What nonsense!" said Kate; "it is well known, both at home and out here, that you have set your heart on Ruby, and she has no right to let you hang about her if she does not care for you."

"Miss Clifford," said Horace seriously—he did not often address her thus, for they had grown up together and had always been "Horace" and "Kate"—"if I do not find fault with Ruby, it seems to me you have no right to do so. Once for all, I would wish you to understand that I am willing to take my chance. If I win her, I shall be a proud and happy man; if not, I shall say, 'God bless her.'"

He did not wait for Kate to answer him, but ran down the steps of the verandah and walked towards Ruby and Sir Hubert. They had been watching him, and came forward to meet him.

"I was just saying," said Sir Hubert, "that I should

try and get back here before the end of the year. Do you think you will still be here, Bracewell?"

"I cannot say; it will depend on many things," he answered shortly.

Something in his voice struck Ruby.

"He is vexed," she thought; "it is all Kate's fault, I am sure."

"Of course you will be here, Horace," she said; "you only arrived in India at the end of January, and you came for a year; at least, you said so."

The kindly, manly face brightened at once.

"I am quite ready to remain as long as you wish, Ruby," he said.

"Oh, Horace," she answered softly, "you must not be jealous of my princess; if you only knew!"

"I only want to know what you like to tell me," he replied.

They were walking side by side now. Sir Hubert, seeing how matters stood, had dropped discreetly into the rear.

"I am not at liberty to tell you much," said Ruby seriously, "but please promise me not to let Kate prejudice you against my princess, or," she hesitated, "against me."

"The last would be impossible," answered Horace "but the princess *is* a serious rival; she engrosses all your time and thoughts."

"I cannot help it; it must be so for the present, Horace," said Ruby decisively.

Looking towards the verandah, they saw that visitors had arrived, and so hurried back. Sir Hubert and Kate were already entertaining Dr. Batson and his wife.

The former was saying,—

"People think there will be a row at Meerut before or after the court-martial. However, it must be all over by thsi time."

"It has been a nasty business altogether," said Sir Hubert, "and the sentence will be a severe one. To my mind Colonel Smyth has bungled terribly. He must have known the temper of the men; why then did he have a preliminary parade at all? Then, again, he made an unnecessary fuss about firing the cartridges, telling the men they would *have* to fire them, instead of merely ordering them to do so."

"Just so," said the doctor; "it was a want of tact and a want of knowledge of the native character of which Colonel Smyth, after his long service, ought not to have been guilty."

"Well, Miss Ruby," he continued, turning to her, "what news of the princess? is she as beautiful as ever?"

"I think she is more beautiful every time I see her," said Ruby. "But please talk of something else; nobody can see me without saying, 'And the princess?'"

They all laughed.

"It is pure jealousy, Miss Ruby," said the doctor. "If you knew how often I have been called upon to describe her appearance! So you are off to-morrow, Sir Hubert?"

"Yes, before sunrise I hope to be on my way."

"Straight to Lahore?" asked the doctor.

"I shall stop for orders at Umballa," answered Sir Hubert. "Officers are needed up there just at present, several having broken down and been sent off to the hills. Sir John Lawrence was to have gone on a visit to England—he needs the change and rest badly—but he has compromised with his doctor and is off to the Marrĭ Hills."

"And the commander-in-chief is at Simla, whither we are all bound shortly, I hope," rejoined the doctor, "for the heat down here is unbearable. Ah! young ladies, your first season in the hills, you do not know what awaits you! You are a wise man to remain on guard,

Mr. Bracewell. It is a most dangerous place," he added, laughing.

To cover Ruby's confusion, Sir Hubert interrupted with—

"As it is my last evening, do you ladies feel equal to giving us a little music? Mrs. Batson, please."

That lady acceded willingly. The doctor's wife had a good voice, and Ruby and Kate both sang. So it came to pass that it was late when they all separated, not one of those present imagining but that the following Sunday morning would break as peacefully as it had done week after week for just one hundred years, since British rule had been established in the land and the great Mogul dynasty had become pensioners of a company of merchants.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE OUTBREAK.

ON May 9th, 1857, the sky was lowering, and the wind blew dust clouds over the British cantonment of Meerut, adding not a little to the general feeling of depression. There were few officers or men who did not wish that day at an end, Colonel Melville among the first. He was annoyed at having been so long detained, but the general had made a point of his remaining to see the sentence against the condemned men carried out. Eighty-five Sepoys of the 3rd Cavalry regiment were to be degraded for having refused on parade to take the greased cartridges. The whole business from first to last was intensely painful to him. Like most of the older officers, he believed implicitly in the fidelity of the native regiments, especially of the Sepoys.

On the present occasion, though there was no doubt as to the fact of mutiny, he argued—and many other English officers did likewise—that the way in which Colonel Smyth gave the order differed from the usual formula, and in itself roused suspicion in the men's mind. Be that as it may, the sentence had been passed and confirmed by the commander-in-chief, General Anson, which reduced eighty-five men, who had fought bravely for us under peculiar circumstances, to the rank of felons, publicly degraded, stripped of their uniforms, and manacled before

their late comrades, whilst the sentence of ten years' penal servitude, with hard labour, was pronounced upon them.

It was in vain they raised their hands entreating the general to have mercy on them, and when that failed, turned in passionate rage upon their comrades, upbraiding them for standing impassive, and allowing this disgrace to fall upon them. That appeal also was in vain. Surrounded by the display of European power, long glittering sabres, loaded field-guns, and grooved rifles, resistance was hopeless, and the condemned men were manacled and marched off to gaol. There was scarcely an English officer who did not regret the necessity for such severity. General Hewitt himself could not refrain from saying to Colonel Smyth, "Why did you have a parade? My division has kept quiet. If you had only waited a month or so all would have blown over."

"I am thankful that's finished, and I sincerely hope I may never be called upon to witness such a scene again," said Colonel Melville, as he returned from that tragic morning parade in company of Commissioner Greathead, at whose house he was staying.

"I think we are all glad, especially as everything has gone off quietly," answered the commissioner. "I can say, now it is over, that I fully expected a rising of some sort."

"I believe the fear was very general," answered the colonel. "It is a great mistake to irritate the native soldier. We ought to remember that it is a case of ten to one. If the native regiments rose against us, where should we be? Here at Meerut you have English regiments, but at Delhi, at the present moment, we have not one. It would be a catastrophe."

That evening, the commissioner, his wife, Colonel Melville, and several other officers with their wives dined at the general's, and it was remembered afterwards what

an especially cheerful party they were. It was as if a load had been lifted off their shoulders.

The following morning at breakfast Mrs. Greathead remarked,—

"My ayah has been telling me whilst I was dressing that all sorts of rumours are flying about the bazaars, and that the walls have been placarded during the night with a Mohammedan proclamation, calling upon the people to rise against the English. I wonder how much of it is true?"

"Oh, an infinitesimal part," said her husband carelessly.

It may be as well to explain to our readers that the European and native quarters at the great military cantonment of Meerut were at a considerable distance from each other, there being a great space between them, which was covered with shops and houses and surrounded by gardens and trees. The English officers' bungalows lay to the north of the cantonment, the Sepoy officers' to the south, in the midst of their own men. Much therefore might happen in the native lines without the English officers being cognisant of anything unusual taking place.

It was an intensely hot day, the sun was fierce and the heat scorching, and few Europeans ventured out; but the bazaars were crowded. Mixing with the native soldiery might be seen men and women of loose character, the scum of the lower quarters and of the adjacent villages. In and out of this crowd individuals moved about, speaking first to one, then to another; what they said was never fully known, but certain it is that a nameless fear gradually crept over the whole native population, and the rumour spread that, before night, every Sepoy would have fetters on his wrists and the people would be massacred.

"Mem Sahib will not take the children to church

to-night," said the native nurse, or ayah, to Mrs. Rotten, the chaplain's wife, as the sun went down and the English colony prepared for evening service.

"Indeed, I see no reason why they should not go," answered Mrs Rotten.

"The Sepoys are angry, the people are angry; leave the children," said the ayah. "There is going to be fighting."

"I will tell the sahib—he must judge what we are to do, ayah; but get them dressed at all events," said the lady.

"Not the baba," said the woman pleadingly, lifting a little creature of two years old from the ground and cuddling it in her arms.

"You know baby never goes to church, ayah; you can keep her with you," said Mrs. Rotten; and she went in search of her husband and told him what the ayah had just said.

"Nonsense, my dear," he answered. "I wish you would not allow yourself to be frightened; there is not the least occasion for alarm. Get dressed; the carriage will be round immediately."

Thus tranquillised, Mrs. Rotten went to her room, where the ayah was awaiting her final orders.

"The sahib says we are to go, that there is not the least fear of anything happening. Indeed, I think it would be as well if you came with us; the drive would do baby good, it has been such a hot day; and the coachman can bring you back whilst we are at service."

"If baba goes I will go," answered the woman; "but the mem sahib will remember I warned her;" and with that she left the room to dress herself and the children.

Mrs. Rotten had reason to remember it. They had not gone far when Mr. Rotten became aware that the ayah's warning had not been premature.

"Mem sahib, see!" she said, piteously pointing to armed men who were hurrying along the road.

"I am afraid she is right; there is certainly something up. I wish I could leave you all in a place of safety!" said Mr. Rotten anxiously; then suddenly his face brightened, and he called out to the coachman, "Drive quickly to Saiad Mir Khan Sahib's house."

The ayah's face also brightened.

"The mem sahib and the babas safe there," she said.

Saiad Mir Khan was an Afghan, pensioned six hundred rupees a month for good conduct during the Afghanistan campaign. He was greatly esteemed by the English colony at Meerut, and Mr. Rotten felt sure he could trust him; he was not mistaken. When he heard that a disturbance was threatening, he immediately took Mrs. Rotten and her children into his house. He himself mounted his horse and rode off to warn the commissioner, Mr. Greathead, while Mr. Rotten went to the church. Here he found the other chaplains and a portion of the congregation, with pale, scared faces, not knowing what to do. The certainty that a great danger not only menaced but was upon them had burst like a thunderbolt in their midst. The news had reached them that the gaol had been broken open, the condemned Sepoys set free by their comrades, and together they were robbing and murdering the Europeans; that, moreover, regiments had mutinied and were shooting their officers, and thus suddenly, without warning, the whole Hindu and Mohammedan population had risen against the Feringhees.

Colonel Melville and a few other gentlemen strove to quiet the women, whose terror rose at the sound of the firing; they hurried them away, hiding them in gardens, in outhouses, anywhere that afforded the least prospect of shelter.

"It cannot last long," they assured them; "the dragoons and the European artillery will soon make short work of the mutineers."

But still the massacre went on, the sky grew red with the fired bungalows, and the shrieks of murdered women and children filled the air. Regiment after regiment mutinied, and shot or cut down their officers. Colonel Melville had ridden in hot haste to the commissioner's bungalow, and there he found a group of terrified women huddled together. Already the insurgents surrounded the house, preventing their escape.

"Quick, sahib, to the roof," said Mr. Greathead's khitnutgar; "I'll keep them off."

Was he really bent on saving them, or would he betray them? It was a toss up whether to trust him or not. Mr. Greathead decided to trust him. "To the roof," he called out; and men and women, trembling with horror, climbed to the terraced roof; a second later, and the house was in flames, the rebels swarming round the bungalow. Above the crackling of the wood and the shouts of the infuriated rabble rose the voice of the khitnutgar.

"It is well done, friends and comrades. Down with the Feringhees, every one of them. Follow me; I'll help you catch the commissioner sahib, the mem sahib, and the whole lot of them. They are not here—the commissioner sahib too cunning for that, the old fox. But I know where they are hiding. Be quick, follow Ali Beg, or they will be off;" and advancing boldly into the compound he ran in the opposite direction. As he did so he looked back and made a sign to his master, who was watching him from the roof, that the road was clear. His manner was so perfectly natural that the natives, never doubting, flocked after him. A minute more and it would have been too late; the flames were already gaining the

"'QUICK, SAHIB, TO THIS ROOF! I'LL KEEP THEM OFF.'"

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upper rooms. By a narrow back staircase the occupants of the roof hurried down, scrambled over the garden walls, and ran until they reached the open country. Scarcely had they effected their escape when they saw the bungalow collapse entirely into the flames. Colonel Melville, Mr. Greathead, his wife, and several friends thus owed their escape to a native servant; and this was by no means an isolated case of native fidelity.

To tell of the horrors of that night, of the narrow escapes, the fearful deaths many suffered, of the deeds of daring delicate women accomplished to save their husbands and children, would occupy a volume, and it has all been told again and again. So much only we have ventured feebly to relate to make the after-events of our story clear to our readers. When the morning after that Sabbath Day dawned, the flourishing cantonment of Meerut was a ruin. The so lately smiling bungalows were charred and gutted by fire, pillaged of all their furniture, and the pretty things which had made these houses so graceful had disappeared as if by magic.

Corpses lay on the roadside, in the midst of household goods which the marauders had not had time or strength to carry away. They had done their evil deeds in the dark, and with the first rays of morning light they slunk back to their villages and slums.

The mutineers had also departed, and were already within sight of the Imperial City of the Moguls.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### "DIN! DIN!"

"KATE, come with me into Delhi to-morrow," said Ruby, as having returned from service the two sat together that Sunday evening in the verandah of the bungalow.

"What is the use, Ruby? It does not amuse me being shut up in the palace all day; besides, I must tell you I dislike that fat Persian woman Tulsa, and she hates me; it is much better for us not to meet."

"Oh, but you need not come to the palace! I thought you might go and see Lina Humphrey or the Jennings; it is a long time since you have seen either of them. I met Lina yesterday, and she asked what had become of you; she has not been well, and George has been very busy, or they would have come out. I am awfully sorry to leave you so much alone, Kate, but indeed just now I cannot help it."

"Of course you know what you ought to do, Ruby," said Kate; "but it really is dull out here all alone."

"I am sure it is, dear," answered Ruby, "and if we were not going to Simla so soon, I really would not go into Delhi every day; but I have such a short time to be with the princess."

"Do you really think you will convert her?" said Kate.

"How can I tell?" answered Ruby. "You will come, won't you, Kate?"

"Well, if you really wish it, I will," said Kate.

"Then I will give the order for the palki to come round early."

They sat talking for some time, loth to enter the house, where, notwithstanding the punkahs and every appliance for keeping the atmosphere cool, the heat was simply overpowering.

"I shall be glad to be in the hills. I could not stand much more of this," said Ruby; then she checked herself, thinking of the princess. "I hope father will be here some time to-morrow. You will have chota hazree at the Humphreys' about seven, I daresay," she continued, "and I will fetch you a little before eight; we will come home together. I shall not remain all day with the princess, in case father should come back early."

"Very well," said Kate. "By the by, Ruby, did you hear little Griffiths telling Captain Viney, after church, that a carriage had come from Meerut full of natives, and he was sure they were Sepoys? He said he hoped they were not up to mischief, but that they were spending the evening in the lines with Sepoy officers, and that if any thing has gone wrong at Meerut they were sure to spread the news."

"I shall not feel quiet until father is here," said Ruby; "for the last month we seem to have been living on the edge of a volcano. I am beginning to think it is always so in India, and yet the natives are so polite and seem so docile."

"Yes," said Kate, "and people are so rough to them; they are treated more like dogs than human beings, and the excuse is, that they are so idle and such liars."

"They are both," said Ruby, "and cunning into the bargain."

"They are better than the class of English servants we are able to afford at the vicarage. Oh, how stupid they are!" Kate rose as she spoke, adding, "If it were not for the parents and the children, I should not care ever to go back to it all again; it is such drudgery."

"Well, perhaps you won't," said Ruby, smiling. "I should like to marry you to some nice fellow, Kate; but then you are so difficult to please—you must have money."

Kate turned sharply round.

"Ruby, I know you think meanly of me because of what *you* call my love of 'filthy lucre,' but you cannot understand—you have never felt the want of anything in your life, and I have not only felt it myself, but seen those nearest and dearest to me suffer hourly privations. I will never marry with only the prospect of love in a cottage! Now come to bed, and do not let us speak again on a subject we know beforehand we cannot agree upon."

"All right," said Ruby, as she rose; and they both, like so many others, retired to rest that Sunday night, little dreaming of the tragedy which was being enacted at that very hour at Meerut.

They could not hear the cries of terror and anguish ascending up to heaven, the beginning of the most awful episode in the world's history. That there was a cloud in the world's horizon few ignored, but it was no larger than a man's hand, and no one feared the gathering storm. It was the fashion to smile at the legend of the "Chupatties," of the unknown wanderer who, passing through a village, entered the headman's house, laid before him six pancakes, with the words: "These six pans are for you; you will make six more and send them on to the next village." Even thus it was done from north to south, from east to west of the great continent. Again,

in the Bengal Presidency, a man with a lotus flower appeared one day in the native barracks and gave the flower to the chief native officer; every man in the regiment looked at it, touched it, and passed it on to his fellow; the last receiving it disappeared, and the lotus flower travelled on, from station to station, from hand to hand, wherever a regiment was to be found.

Silence followed in its wake. People wondered, but no one heeded the sign of the times. It was a mystery; the Europeans said that it was some occult ceremony connected with the native religion of the country and must not be interfered with; and so the matter was suffered to drop.

On that Monday morning, May 11th, at early sunrise parade, the 38th, 54th, and 74th Regiments in the Delhi cantonment were called upon to hear the proceedings of the late court-martial, which had condemned Isri Pandi, the Barrackpur Jamadar, to be hanged for revolt. The sentence had been carried into execution on April 22nd. As the minutes were read out, the assembled Sepoys gave vent to an audible murmur of disapproval. The parade over, the men dispersed, and the officers went to the mess-house or their own bungalows for early breakfast, to talk over any news which might be afloat. One or two of the older officers expressed anxiety at the spirit of disaffection which was evidently gaining ground.

"And to think we have not one single English regiment either in the cantonment or in Delhi!" said Captain Wallace to his major. "If one native regiment mutinies, as at Meerut, we shall have a nasty time of it."

"Well, I'll answer for every man in my regiment," said Major Abbot. "I don't know why you are so down in the mouth, Wallace!"

"The scene this morning affected me so unpleasantly," said the captain. "I overheard the colonel of the 54th say he had never seen his men so sulky."

"Oh, Ripley is always ready to take alarm," answered the major.

Quitting the mess-house, after chota hazree, each officer went to his own home with the feeling of perfect security. Scarcely had an hour elapsed when the native servants and the Sepoy orderlies brought the news that something had happened at Meerut, and that the native cavalry from that town was forcing its way into the city of Delhi. Even then there was no real alarm, though at the sound of the bugle-call the officers, still half dressed, buckled on their swords and hurried to join their regiments. The ladies had just returned from their morning ride, and to their eager questions the men answered shortly that there could be no danger, that the troops at Meerut had mutinied, and that a few fugitives were making their way into Delhi; that there was no cause for anxiety; there were plenty of European troops at Meerut—the rifles, carabineers, and the white artillery; they would follow and cut them up. There was no time to say more. With a hurried embrace—for many of them their last—each man went to his place.

The night had been overpoweringly hot, and although the punkahs were kept going and the bungalow was, so to speak, hermetically closed, Ruby had suffered even more than usual; indeed, she was in such high fever, and so restless, that Kate had fetched Jane, who had administered a cooling draught and placed wet cloths upon her head. Just before sunrise, when all the doors were thrown open and the tepid air allowed to circulate through the rooms, she had fallen into a quiet sleep.

"Miss Clifford, the palkis are waiting, but I think you

will have to go into Delhi alone. Miss Melville has just fallen asleep. I cannot think of waking her."

"Of course not, Jane," said Kate. "I almost wish I were going to stay at home myself."

"Oh no, miss, that is quite unnecessary, and it would vex Miss Melville to think she had deprived you of the pleasure. I have brought you some tea," and she put the cup on the table beside Kate.

"Well, if you think my staying would vex her I will go," she said, sipping her tea.

"I am sure it would," said Jane, "and the air will do you good after such a night."

"If I were going to ride in, yes, but not in a palki. If I had known Ruby had not been going to the palace I would have ridden."

A few minutes later Kate Clifford left the Melville bungalow, utterly ignorant that the troopers of the 3rd Cavalry regiment from Meerut were sweeping down on the devoted city. It was a little past six when she reached her friend's house, situated in the neighbourhood of the palace, in close proximity to the Calcutta Gate. Lina Humphrey was a Scotch girl, and had come out to join her brother, who held a civil appointment under Commissioner Fraser. She and Kate had taken a liking for each other, and had been a good deal together before the heat had set in. The Humphreys often visited the Melville bungalow for afternoon tea and a game of croquet.

Indeed, George Humphrey had at one time paid Kate considerable attention. What passed between them never quite transpired, but Ruby guessed that Kate had given him to understand that she was not willing to climb the ladder of fortune, beginning at the bottom; and Lina shrugged her shoulders when George wanted to shirk going to the Melville bungalow.

She was a shrewd, clever Scotch girl.

"My dear fellow," she said, "it's her first year out; she's poor, and her people are poor; she's just sick of it all. There's a lot of good in Kate, but she's made up her mind not to be a poor man's wife if she can help it. There's no use in your sulking because she does not give in at once. If you think it worth your while, keep friends with her, and run the risk of her coming round. Besides, you may get advancement."

George Humphrey followed her advice, and the intimacy continued on a very comfortable footing.

When Kate arrived this especial morning she found Lina and her brother at breakfast. They welcomed her heartily, inquired after Ruby, and expressed their regret at her being unwell.

"But it is not surprising considering the heat we are having. I suppose as soon as the colonel returns you will be off to Simla."

"Yes, and we hope he will be with us to-day," answered Kate.

George Humphrey was in the act of handing Kate a cup of tea when his attention was attracted by the sight of five troopers riding in hot haste towards the palace, whilst the flames of the toll-house rose behind them.

"Din! din!" The cry rang out ominously, whilst on they dashed, until they reached the courtyard of the palace and clamoured for admittance to the king, calling out that they had slain the Feringhees at Meerut, and were fighting for the faith.

George Humphrey sprang up and went to the window, from which were visible the bright waters of the Jumna, spanned by a bridge of boats with a toll-house at the entrance. The Calcutta Gate had been closed, but they

could see the five troopers coming up the long line of palace buildings. The confusion in the palace was great. The old king was terrified. Commissioner Fraser addressed the Sepoy Guards, but even while he was still speaking they fraternised with the new-comers; then seizing a gun from the man nearest him Mr. Fraser shot the foremost trooper down. But it was of no avail. The suspense did not last long. In less time than it takes to tell, every English man, woman, and child within the palace walls had been done to death. Quickly they passed through their tribulation with the half-uttered prayer still on their lips.

Of the scene that followed it is impossible here to tell; the whole city was given up to rapine and murder. Tender women and young children were slain and outraged. Every Englishman was cut down, and their houses set on fire; and the murderers, with their swords dripping with blood, their awful faces distorted with bestial passions, went about calling upon their fellows to arm and do likewise.

Lina Humphrey and Kate Clifford were not long in ignorance of what was going on. They heard the shrieks, they saw their country-women flying down the streets half-naked, children tossed into the air, and caught on the point of the bayonet, and their faces grew white with terror. But Lina was a brave-hearted girl, tall and strong, with the high cheek-bones, the grey-blue honest eyes, and sandy hair of her race. She laid her hand heavily on Kate's shoulder, saying,—

"If our hour is come, we will at least die game, Kate, and Christ have mercy on our souls! Don't faint, Kate, or you are lost. Listen, they are coming!"

As she spoke she opened a case of pistols, and thrust one into Kate's hands. She herself took her brother's

gun, and raised it to her shoulder. She cast one more look at Kate, who returned it, saying simply,—

"I'll do as you do, Lina," and she straightened herself.

Then the door burst open, and two Sepoys rushed forward with a yell of triumph.

"Fire!" said Lina Humphrey, between her white lips. At the same time the gun she held went off, and the foremost man fell dead. Kate also had drawn the trigger of her pistol, and by chance, or rather guided by God's will, she had also wounded her man, who fell to the ground beside his companion. Happily there were only two of them. "Quick!" said Lina, throwing down the heavy gun; and snatching up two other pistols out of the case, she leapt over the prostrate forms, and rushed down the stairs into the street.

For a few hundred yards they ran on unmolested, Lina leading; then they turned into a side street, and once more a hideous creature, half man, half devil, faced them. Without hesitation, Lina fired; he fell dead or wounded. She did not turn round, but catching hold of Kate's hand, they went on their way, their pistols held high, threatening every mortal man who should impede their progress. With their white, set faces, their agonised eyes, and streaming hair, they may have been taken for avenging angels, and so were allowed to pass on.*

At last they were out of the city and beyond the lines. How they did it they never knew, but somehow they reached the jungle.

Then for the first time they paused, and looked at each other. "Oh, Kate," said Lina, "you poor thing!" The terror, the agony in the girl's face was awful to behold. "She is going mad," thought Lina. "The worst is over," she said encouragingly, thinking only of the

* This story in most parts is authentic.

horror which lay behind them, not of what was still before. Putting her strong arm round the fainting girl, she upheld her. "If you can only drag yourself a little farther, I know we are not far from a small temple. We might find shelter there from this awful heat, and from these beasts," she added between her teeth.

The sun was pouring down pitilessly upon them—that burning, red, Indian sun, which scorches up every blade of grass, and kills all vegetation.

"Go on; I can go on for ever," exclaimed Kate. "If we stop they will catch us," and she began shivering from head to foot.

"Come, then," said Lina, and once more they started off over the rough ground; sometimes crouching low, lest their tall figures should be caught sight of.

At last they reached a little whitewashed temple, with a pyramidal roof, surmounted by an iron trident. It had been built under a sacred tree, round whose twisted trunk orange sprigs of double marigold, scented and scentless flowers, grew in profusion. But one thing alone caught their sight. Close by the temple, in its shadow, was a horse and a buggy. They dared not approach at first, not knowing who the owner might be.

"Let us lie down here and wait," said Lina, and they lay down in the rank grass.

They had waited thus about five minutes, when suddenly Lina sprang up, exclaiming,—

"What a fool I am, Kate! We will get into the buggy and drive away. It is our only chance. We are just waiting to be caught.

Obediently Kate rose. They were faint and footsore, and to continue walking, bareheaded, and with bleeding feet, in the blazing sun, would have been impossible. If they could only secure this buggy, they would be sheltered,

and might get to some town or village. They cast one look around them.

"Quick, Kate; jump in," said Lina, as she unfastened the horse. It was a good animal, and the vehicle was also good, probably the property of some poor fellow. What would he do? they wondered; but it was the case of a life for a life, and they did not hesitate. A few minutes later they were driving away from Delhi, whither they knew not.

"Keep your pistol in your hand, Kate," said Lina; she had laid hers across her knees. The sense of comparative safety relaxed Kate's nerves, and brought memory back.

"Ruby, poor Ruby!" she murmured.

"And George," said Lina, in a hard, dry voice.

No tears came to their eyes. The horror of what they had seen and heard was still upon them. Theirs was dry-eyed agony, which seres the soul; and so silently they drove on. Was it to life or death?

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE NINE.

RUBY was awakened that Monday morning by a tapping against her window-panes, and opening her eyes, she saw the fluttering white wings of the princess's doves.

"Dear things! Let them in, Jane," she said, lifting her head languidly.

"I wish they had let you sleep a bit longer," answered Jane as she drew up the green blinds, and the beautiful feathered favourites flew in and settled on Ruby's outstretched hand.

"You pretty things!" she said, caressing them as they each dropped into her disengaged hand a large white pearl. "I think they get bigger and bigger every day," said Ruby, looking at them admiringly. "But, Jane, it must be very late; why have you let me oversleep myself? I promised Miss Clifford to start with her early this morning."

"Miss Clifford's been gone this hour or more," answered Jane. "You must be content to remain quiet this morning, Miss Ruby, after the night you've had; it is the best thing you can do."

"I feel good for nothing," she answered. "I suppose it is the heat. You must go home and tell your mistress she will not see me to-day, sweets. Give me a pencil and paper, Jane."

Jane did so, and Ruby wrote on a little slip, "Love, tired—to-morrow." She put it into the beak of one of the doves, uttered the Hindustanee word "Hujao," * and they flew away.

"It's going to be an awful day," said Jane. "I believe we shall all be baked alive before we reach them hills."

She had hardly uttered the words, when the purdah was pushed on one side and Tita, Ruby's especial ayah, rushed in. The few words she spoke blanched the English girl's face.

"Give me my clothes, quick, Jane!" she exclaimed. "Tita says the Sepoys have mutinied, are killing their officers and firing the bungalows."

"They are here, they are coming!" called out the ayah, throwing some loose clothes over Ruby's nightdress. "Quick! quick!" A fearful shriek from Jane paralysed Ruby; she felt something heavy thrown over her, a hand laid on her mouth, and she was lifted from off the ground. In her turn she lost consciousness.

Scarcely half an hour later Horace arrived at the bungalow. At the first alarm he had started off, and he saw at one glance that he had come too late. Every door was open, but there was no sign of any human being about the place. The servants had either fled or were in hiding. The greatest disorder reigned everywhere; the rooms had been already pillaged; the drawers, cupboards, chiffoniers, were wide open, and much of the contents strewn on the ground.

He rushed through the house calling "Ruby! Kate!" but received no answer. Pushing the already half-open door of Ruby's room, the first thing he saw was Jane, lying on the ground in a pool of blood, her head almost severed from her body; horrified, he looked round in

* "Be off."

search of Ruby or Kate, but seeing no sign of either he concluded they had escaped and were hiding. He ransacked the house from top to bottom, looking in every possible and impossible place, but in vain; and then he perceived the flames rising from the back premises. The Melville bungalow was one of the first to be fired. He rushed out and found the whole cantonment in an uproar; every one was intent upon flight. Horses, carriages, carts, were laden with household goods, snatched from the ruin around.

Many of the Sepoys still hesitated on the verge of mutiny, waiting to see the turn affairs might take; they entreated their officers to escape while there was yet time —in many cases helping them to do so. Fugitives from Delhi were beginning to drop in, men and women who had escaped out of the city through sheer pluck, risking their lives at every step to get away, because they knew that to remain was to court worse than death.

Of all these Horace inquired despairingly if they had come across Ruby Melville or Kate Clifford, but the answer was ever the same. "No one had seen them." At the flagstaff tower the women and children were already huddled together for safety; at the mainguard on the ridge it was the same thing. Utterly regardless of personal danger Horace went from one place to the other, lending a helping hand wherever he could, but always intent upon one thing—finding either Ruby or Kate. As a last hope he went to Metcalfe House.

From the first Sir Theophilus had been among the most active in striving to stem the tide of mutiny which threatened to overwhelm them. At dawn, when the rumour of mutiny reached him, he had hurried to the great Delhi magazine, where enormous supplies of war ammunition made it of the greatest importance to prevent the enemy

securing an entrance. He informed Lieutenant Willoughby, the officer in charge of the arsenal, that the mutineers were on the road from Meerut.

"Give me two guns and we will yet defend the bridge and prevent their getting in that way," said the brave, resolute magistrate. But even as he spoke he saw it was too late; the troopers had crossed the bridge, fired the toll-house, and were entering the palace court.

"What will you do?" he asked Lieutenant Willoughby. "You cannot trust the native soldiers, and the magazine will be the first place the rabble will rush at."

"Do!" answered Willoughby. "There is only one thing we can do: stick to our guns, shut the gates, and keep the niggers out as long as possible. We are nine Englishmen; we can surely hold our own until the white regiments arrive from Meerut; they must be here by midday. If the rascals press us too closely, why, then we will blow the whole concern up. The train is laid."

Sir Theophilus shook the young lieutenant's hand without uttering another word. He knew what the threat meant, but he never doubted the deed, if necessary, would be accomplished; and so he left him. The white regiments from Meerut! How every eye was strained, from the mainguard to the flagstaff tower and the magazine, to catch the first sight of those who alone could bring them relief; but the hours went by and they came not.

When the King of Delhi summoned the guardians of the great magazine to surrender, no answer was vouchsafed. Throughout those morning hours, until the sun was slanting in the heavens, those nine Englishmen Willoughby had boasted of stood at their posts. All the native soldiers in the place had joined the enemy. Scaling ladders were brought, and the rabble streamed over the walls, to be driven back by round upon round of grape-

shot, fired by men who knew their work well, whose every shot told, and whose presence of mind never for one second forsook them. But the mutineers pressed forward, through gaps it had been impossible to protect, and ammunition was fast failing. Two of the nine Englishmen were wounded, but they all stood at their posts. They knew the game was up, they knew what had to come, but they did not flinch. Brave hearts, true nerves! Men whom mothers might well be proud to have borne!

Quietly Willoughby gave the signal, and Conductor Scully fired the train. In a few seconds it was all over: the magazine, with a portion at least of its vast munition, was blown up, obscuring the sky with smoke and shaking the earth for miles round as with an earthquake.

Hundreds of natives perished, the *débris* blown into the air striking and injuring many at a great distance from the actual scene of the catastrophe.

Whilst still in doubt as to what had really happened, the officers at the mainguard saw two men, their faces blackened beyond recognition, stagger into their midst; these were George Willoughby and Lieutenant Foster. They were bruised and wounded, but beyond all expectation alive. Two subalterns also escaped and found their way to Umballa; the other five men perished.

When the news of this gallant deed reached England, there was one cry of admiration, one throb of pride throughout the land.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE SORROW THAT KILLS.

"I HAVE not the least doubt as to her fate," Horace Bracewell was saying to Sir Theophilus. "I returned to the bungalow hoping against hope that she might have hidden herself and been afraid to come out. I chanced upon the mali, who was skulking about, and he settled all doubts. When I asked him if he knew anything he said, 'Ha, ha, Missy Clifford went to Delhi soon after sunrise, but Missy Ruby remained. They kill the old woman (meaning Jane) and carry away the young.' It is truly awful. I had much rather know they had killed her right off! My pretty Ruby!" And tears of agony poured down his face.

"Of course you would. I'd kill my wife with my own hands rather than have her fall into the hands of those devils," answered Sir Theophilus with concentrated passion. "Do you know they are at the present moment gutting my house out, led on by whom do you suppose? My own khitnutgar, a man who has been my right hand ever since I can remember. We were boys together, and he has been pampered beyond measure. I ask but for one thing, to hang that fellow with my own hands, and if I get the chance I will do it.* But now it is time to act, as well as to think. We must get the women and children out of this place, for it is impossible to hold it much longer."

They had managed to reach the mainguard, once more

* The man was hung in front of Metcalfe House.

hoping to aid in the defence, until the longed-for help from Meerut should arrive.

Some hours before, brave Doctor Batson had volunteered to force his way to the cantonment, and if he had not already done so to urge General Hewitt to send help at once. The doctor started, and through God's mercy he reached his journey's end, but after days of wandering through the jungle, starved, beaten, stripped of his clothes, more dead than alive. Every minute the position of those defenders of the mainguard was growing worse. Volley upon volley of grape shot was poured in upon them, until it was a marvel that a single life was spared.

"It is impossible to remain here," said Sir Theophilus, joining a group of officers.

"We are perfectly agreed on that point," answered the major, "but how are we to get out? The only possible way of escape would be by the embrasure in the bastion; but there is a fall of thirty feet on the other side, and then the glacis! If we reach the top of that we can make for the jungle. A strong man uninjured might manage it; for the wounded, the women and children, it is impossible."

"Is there no other way out?" asked another man.

"There is no other way," answered the major.

"Then let us tell them so," said Sir Theophilus; and they went into that dismal guard-house, where the ladies had taken refuge and were now waiting huddled together, some weeping for their dead, others trembling for the living.

"It is our only chance," the major explained; "if you cannot do it, then we must all die together."

"We will try," they said, and went forth; but when they saw what was expected of them they shrank back. The firing grew heavier and heavier, the shots came pouring down amongst them; they saw their men fall, and cried out, wringing their hands,—

"Go and leave us, you can save yourselves."

But the men even in that dread hour smiled and shook their heads. Not one of them moved a step forward to obey.

"If we had a strong rope or something," said Horace Bracewell, "we might get down in the ditch ourselves, and the women, holding on, might be dropped down to us."

"Our belts!" said a young subaltern; and quick as thought the officers unbuckled their belts, fastened them together and descended into the ditch; and the women, holding on to this support, and aided by other men from above, dropped one by one to their side. There at least they were out of the range of the shots, but they had to climb the glacis, which seemed even more impossible. At every step the earth crumbled beneath their feet, and they fell back. Staunch and true, those brave Englishmen and those delicately nurtured women struggled on together for dear life.

More than once Horace Bracewell, having reached the top with one burden, descended to help another girl or woman, who gazed upwards in sheer hopelessness of ever climbing to the summit. They were begrimed, soiled, their thin summer clothing torn to pieces; but they still encouraged each other. Fortunately there were few children, but these the men lashed on their backs; and so at last they all stood on the crest of that awful glacis, beyond which lay the jungle. But the end of their troubles had not come; they fled they knew not whither—every man's hand was against them, they were literally hunted to death. Beaten, stripped of clothing, wading through rivers, hungry and athirst beneath the fierce unclouded sun of that Indian summer, no marvel if many fainted and fell by the wayside, never to rise again. Others struggled on, the wife often supporting the wounded husband, until they reached an English station. In a few cases the

natives were merciful and helped them ; a Brahmin kept a lady and her child hidden for several days, giving them all the milk of his one goat. A fakir carried a child many miles, until he reached a station, refusing all reward, asking only that a well bearing his name might commemorate his deed of charity. When peace once more reigned over the country this was done.

"Bracewell," said Sir Theophilus, "where are you going?"

"I neither know nor care," answered Horace savagely.

"Then come along with me. It is no use your going off into the jungle. I ordered a man who has been my coachman for years to bring a carriage and horses from my stables to a place on the road to Umballa—that was before the rascals got into my house. I expect he has forgotten all about it, or is perhaps riding my horses himself, but we may as well see. It is of no use staying in Delhi; it is enough to drive one mad. Come." And putting his arm in Horace's, he hurried him away.

He had taken a great liking to the young Englishman: his sorrow and his love, so simple, so unaffected, and yet so deep, had touched Sir Theophilus. Throughout that struggle at the mainguard he had been so helpful, so gentle to the women and children, though the look of agonised pain had never left his eyes.

"I'll keep him with me," he thought; "he's got no one to see after him, and nothing definite to do. I should not like anything to happen to him, and—who knows?—the girl may turn up yet, though I doubt it."

To their surprise, hidden in a clump of trees at the appointed place, they found the carriage and horses waiting.

"So you remembered your master, Ali?" said Sir Theophilus, not unkindly.

"Sahib, I will drive you," answered the man humbly.

"Say rather you will shoot me if you can get a chance," answered Sir Theophilus.

"No, Ali is faithful, Ali will help you to get away; by the beard of the great prophet, I will not forsake you, sahib."

There was a ring of truth in the man's voice; the horses were getting restive, it was no time for hesitation.

"Listen," said Sir Theophilus, "twenty-four hours ago I should never have doubted you, but now it is different. I have loaded pistols on my person—the sahib has the same; if you give me the faintest reason for doubting your fidelity, I swear, not by your prophet, but by *my God*, that I will blow your brains out!"

"Good; but quick, sahib! See!" The man jumped on the box and had gathered up the reins, for coming by a cross road at full gallop were three mounted Sepoys.

Sir Theophilus and Horace sprang into the already moving vehicle, but they had been seen, and the cry "Din! din!" and the tramp of horses' feet seemed close behind them. Ali lashed his horses, and they flew on. Horace Bracewell stood up in the carriage and fired at the foremost trooper; the man fell from his horse. Sir Theophilus had also risen, his pistol in his hand.

"Leave them to me," said Horace, a strange light in his eyes; and when the troopers came up within range, he fired once, twice, with the same unerring precision. One man fell forward on his saddle, and the third trooper's horse was hit and rolled over with his master. Then Horace seated himself; not a muscle of his face had moved.

"Well done, Bracewell," said Sir Theophilus.

"It will not give us back our dead, our worse than dead!" he answered sombrely.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.

ALL the night of May 10th the Princess Azile remained on the roof of her palace. She was always a light sleeper, but on this night she could not rest at all. It seemed to her that she heard strange noises, the tramping of horses' hoofs and a rushing sound as of much people, at first far off, but coming ever nearer and nearer, until a great terror seized her, and she rose from her couch and strove to see through the balustrades down into the sleeping city below; but naught was visible, and she lifted her eyes for comfort to the starlit heaven. Even thence no comfort came to her, until at last she sank into a restless slumber. Was she dreaming, or was it a vision which troubled her? She lay motionless, but cry after cry escaped her lips, startling her attendants. Rhookia sprang to her side, took her hand, and sought to awaken her; after some seconds she succeeded, and the princess sat up trembling in every limb and with great drops as of mortal pain standing on her brow.

Surely she must still have been dreaming, for she threw her arms over her head, clasping her hands, and calling out, "Christ, Christ, save them!" and tears rained from her eyes.

It was her Gethsemane. Her pure soul foresaw the agony which was coming on the world, and she bore

her part, the divinest of all sorrow—not her own, but others'.

Knowledge, love, power, had come quickly to her; her soul was flooded with light; she saw and understood.

As her tears fell the child's soul died within her, and the woman's soul, strong to love, to suffer, and to do, attained its full maturity. She felt the change, lifted her head, and looked towards the east. The stars were still visible, but the faintest line of red in the far horizon told of approaching dawn. She shivered slightly, but she was quite calm.

"Go and rest," she said to her maidens, "it was only a dream," and with her hands she waved them off. Nothing loth they went, each dropping down in her place and slumbering forthwith.

"Rhookia," said the princess, "it is early; nevertheless, I will take my bath." She rose, and in the dim grey light descended to the marble tank-room, out of the walls of which a cascade of clear water flowed into the space beneath. Innumerable little mirrors with silver flowers embossed on them hung at equal distances, whilst in a double row of niches lamps were placed, shedding a soft light over the whole scene. Green plants and high rushes surrounded this tank, to which marble steps led down.

One side of this chamber was partitioned off by richly embroidered curtains of white damask, fringed with silver; this was the princess's dressing-room.

Never had Rhookia known Azile so difficult to please, or so careful about her attire as she was on the present occasion. One costly costume after the other was cast on one side, and at last she chose a white cashmere robe of the finest web, embroidered throughout with silver threads.

It differed from the usual Indian fashion of long tunics and full trousers closing at the ankles, resembling rather

a flowing Grecian robe. The rajah had once seen a daughter of the French General Allard thus attired, and he had ordered a similar one for Azile. She had worn it once or twice to please him, then it had been laid aside. Now, when by mere chance Rhookia happened to bring it forth, Azile said simply,—

"That will do."

"It is like what the Missy Sahibs wear," said Rhookia.

Azile made no answer, but when Rhookia brought her pearls and diamonds she put them away from her, saying gently,—

"Not to-day, Rhookia."

She chose, however, two large pearls, wrapped them in a fold of her saree, and ascended once more to the roof of her house.

It was full daylight now. She uttered a familiar call, and two doves fluttered to her feet. Taking them in her hands, she placed in turn a pearl in each beak; then saying softly, "Hujao," threw them up in the air and watched them fly away. They were her last messengers to Ruby.

She was still watching their flight when she was again startled by strange sounds ascending to her from the streets below: the firing of guns, followed by women's shrieks, and over and above all the familiar "Din! din!" of the Mussulman.

"What does it mean, what is happening?" she asked, with a bewildered air.

Hardly had the question passed her lips when Tulsa came hurrying up as fast as her ungainly size would permit.

"Princess," she exclaimed, "the Sepoys have mutinied against the Feringhees, their raj is over, the King of Delhi is proclaimed sole ruler in the land, and my people

the great Persian nation are on their way down to prepare a new rule."

"But what is the meaning of those cries?" asked the princess.

Tulsa hesitated for a minute; then she answered,—

"They are slaying the Feringhees."

Every particle of colour faded out of the princess's face, but she neither trembled nor hesitated; her voice was steady as she gave the order,—

"Let my palanquin be brought into the great hall, and tell my bearers to be in readiness. I would go forth."

"Princess, you cannot—you must not!" said Tulsa.

"And wherefore, if it be my will and pleasure, should I not go forth?" asked the princess proudly. "Am I a prisoner in my own palace?"

Tulsa approached close to her and whispered in Persian,—

"Because of your white face and blue eyes; they would take you for a Feringhee, and would slay you."

"And my guard," said the princess—"the brave men given me by my father, and who brought me here, will they not protect me? They know I am Futtih Singh's daughter, under the care of 'Nichelseyn.' Is not that enough?"

"Not to-day, Princess," said Baasha Singh, who had just joined them. "You cannot go forth."

"I must go—I must save her!" she murmured, the death-like pallor of her face and her white lips testifying to her agony.

"It is too late," said Baasha Singh slowly. "I knew what your desire would be, and at the first sign of trouble I went to the bungalow; but others had been there before me—the house was pillaged, one white mem sahib lay dead on the floor, the house was in flames, but her you

love was nowhere. I saw a young sahib come and look, even as I had done, and he too went away sorrowful."

Azile passed her hand across her brow as if to sweep away an evil vision. At that moment a shriek of agony rose up to her from below; she started as if an electric shock had run through her whole frame; to those looking at her she seemed suddenly to have grown taller.

"Throw wide open my palace gates," she cried, her clear, silvery voice ringing out above the tumult below. "Tell my brave Sikhs to let the Feringhees enter and to keep their murderers at bay. Go, Baasha Singh, and do my bidding."

The old man hesitated.

"Must I go myself?" she said imperiously.

"Nay, Princess, I will go and find Shir Singh and see what can be done," he answered, and went hastily forth out of her presence.

At that moment the Church of St. John, which was in close proximity to the princess's house, was besieged by the infuriated mob; they desecrated the sacred building and the sacramental plate, and then rang a peal of bells in very mockery. Surely it was the work of the Evil One, and the devils were fain to rejoice as the ropes were cut, and, with a fearful crash, the great bells fell to the ground.

Motionless Azile stood, horror-stricken; then suddenly she threw up her hands.

"What is their Christ doing? Can He not save them?" she cried.

"Christ, save us!" How many hearts uttered that cry in those days of awful martyrdom! And to many it seemed as if He did not hear, and their faith failed them.

But there were those who never doubted; they were passing through "great tribulation," their hearts were faint within them, but listening they still heard that tender

voice saying, "Fear not, I am with you even unto the end." Strong men marvelled how the women bore themselves so bravely, loving them with a tenderness which made these last hours of life ineffably sweet; encircling them in their weak arms, clinging fearlessly round their necks to save them from their murderers, and by their whispered words bringing back to the memories of many the prayers, half-forgotten in the world's turmoil, which they had lisped at their mothers' knees. And so husbands, and wives, and lovers, gazing into each other's eyes, saw there a light not of earth but of heaven, and they believed. The waves were rising higher and higher, the storm raged and the winds blew, and the cry ascended up to the great throne, "Lord, save us, or we perish."

And He did save them!

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MUST THEY DIE?

BAASHA SINGH found Shir Singh and delivered to him the princess's message.

"If we do as she bids us we may as well give the princess herself up to the rabble, and they will tear her to pieces," said Shir Singh. "Do you not know I have already taken the precaution to double the guard, and no one can come in or go out of the palace without the password? A rumour has got abroad (I know not how) amongst the Sepoys that our 'White Ranee' is a Feringhee. The fact that she was brought to Delhi to be placed under British protection has put great rage into the hearts of Zeenat Mahal and the princes. They are eager to get possession of some portion at least of her wealth. Zeenat Mahal sent for me in the king's name this morning, to know if the Sikhs now in the city would be faithful to the royal cause, and desiring also that the princess should be taken to her apartments and confined there as hostage for our fidelity. I answered that this could not be, that the Sikhs would not suffer their princess to be removed; also that her especial guard would not interfere in any way with the business now on hand in the city, and that in consideration of these privileges we were willing to pay any sum she liked to name into the royal treasury."

"And you have had your answer?" asked Baasha Singh.

"Yes," said Shir Singh; "the amount asked was absurdly

large, but it matters not; we have paid it, and I hoped that for the present, until their needs are once more pressing, we should have had peace; but the princess's order changes all things. We cannot save the Feringhees, and if the Ranee shows herself she will also die."

Restless with a great pain at her heart, notwithstanding Tulsa's remonstrance, the princess descended the marble staircase on her way to the great audience hall.

"I will speak with Shir Singh myself," she said, and she swept on. As she did so she passed close by the chamber where the men were holding counsel, and the last words fell on her ears.

She slackened her steps and smiled beneath her veil.

"To die, to sleep," she murmured. "What matters it?" But suddenly a thought welled up within her, "Never to awake again, never to love," and humbly she bowed her head, conscious of her woman's weakness.

"Tell Shir Singh I am here waiting for him," she said, standing at the upper end of the audience chamber. The sunlight poured through the delicately carved lattices, dancing on the marble pavement and on the walls inlaid with mosaics of flowers and birds of every hue, whilst richly gilt pillars supported the roof.

The slight girlish figure stood as in a shrine, so gorgeous was the setting.

"Truly, she is 'heavenly born,'" thought Shir Singh as he salaamed before her.

"Shir Singh, I have sent for you," said the clear, sweet voice, "because my heart is sore and my spirit fails me. I have neither husband nor brother, and I have none to help me. When my father, Futtih Singh, was dying, he bade me with his last breath be faithful to and serve the Feringhees. He foresaw and prophesied that evil days were coming upon them. You heard him, Shir Singh,

and you too, Baasha Singh, and the great sahib whom you all worship was there also. Will you obey my father or will you not? They are slaying the Feringhees, and I bid you go to the rescue. Listen!" And she raised her hand, that white hand through whose transparency the blue veins showed like network. That hand alone, the two men knew full well, would betray her race, and compass her death.

"Listen," she repeated louder as they made no answer, for through the open entrances there came the firing of guns and shrieks rending the air.

"Gracious Ranee," said Shir Singh, "you are indeed worthy to be our Ranee, for you have a lion's heart, and my master said truly you are strong. But what you ask of us is impossible; we cannot save the Feringhees; we are but a handful of men, and the Sepoys and the rabble are many, and they are mad. If we went forth into the streets against them with our drawn swords, we should be slain to a man, and you and your women would be left alone a prey to the wicked Queen Zeenat Mahal. Gracious Ranee, be wise. I have this day made an agreement and paid a sum of money for you to remain free, and your guard is to be exempt from service, and no Sikh is to be called upon to slay a Feringhee, and—who can tell?—we may yet help them if we keep quiet and do not offend."

"And the great Sahib Nichelseyn's people are to die?" said the Ranee. "Surely he will avenge them and slay you?"

"We shall be at his mercy," said Shir Singh. "He will know. Spies are swarming round your palace, Ranee, to catch a sight of you, telling many that you are a Feringhee, and the Sepoys are mad drunk with blood; they are as wild beasts."

"And will they spare none? Can we not save one for a

peace-offering to the Unseen God, to Nichelseyn's Christ?" she pleaded, in tones so piteous that the men's hearts failed them; but they dared not answer her. "Did you not say that both the king and Zeenat Mahal loved gold?" asked the princess eagerly.

"It is through gold I have purchased your freedom, Ranee," said Shir Singh.

"Then," she answered, "I bid you go to the king and tell him I am ready to pay two thousand rupees for every Feringhee woman he delivers into my hands, and one thousand rupees for every child, but he who finds and brings Ruby Melville safely to my palace shall claim from me a lac of rupees. What do I say, Shir Singh? Empty my treasury, give gold, give jewels! What care I, if we can save *my jewel*? Search and find her. She is not dead, for I hear her weeping, and my soul yearns for her; but you will not let me go forth, and my heart is breaking;" and she wept aloud.

"Be comforted, Princess; I will seek for her," said Baasha Singh. "Go to your chamber and wait; before night we shall know whether she you love be yet among the living."

"I hear her weeping and moaning, and the dead are silent," said the princess; and with her head bowed low, as one who sorrows greatly, she went to her own place.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MARTYRS.

SHIR SINGH and his companions kept silence until the princess had disappeared, then Baasha Singh asked,—

"What are we to do?"

"I know not," answered Shir Singh. "I dare not carry her message to the king. He has no secret from the woman who rules him; he would tell Zeenat Mahal, and the Ranee's life would be in her hands. So far it has gone well, but to offer a lac of rupees for a Feringhee is to declare war. She will send for the Ranee, and her white face will betray her; for surely she is not of our people, she also is a Feringhee."

"Who can tell?" answered Baasha Singh. "Rhookia knows more than either you or I; she has never spoken. She found the babe beside a dead woman, she says, laid her in her bosom with her own child, and brought her to the rajah. If she knew aught else, he commanded her to keep silence, and she has obeyed."

"Just so," answered Shir Singh, "and I have sworn to stand by and serve the Ranee, upholding her rights; but now if the Feringhees' raj be truly over and the Mogul dynasty is to rule in the land, sooner or later the Ranee's blue eyes and fair hair will bring trouble upon her. If Zeenat Mahal sends for her to the zenana, she is lost."

"You will not let her go," said Baasha Singh.

"Not if I can help it; but this new fantasy of hers, how am I to satisfy it?"

"Leave it with me," answered Baasha Singh. "I will tell her you are in treaty for a mem sahib or a baba, and that she must be patient."

"It is useless," said Shir Singh. "Before two days are over there will not be a Feringhee in the city; they are murdering them as fast as they can. Fifty mem sahibs and babas have taken refuge in the palace; it will fare worse with them. The king has no power, he is terrified; the queen rules, and she will have no mercy, because the rebels have promised her that her own son Jawan Bakt shall be heir."

"Do you say there are Feringhees in the palace itself?" asked Baasha Singh.

"Yes, in a dungeon, crowded together," answered Shir Singh.

"Give me two hundred rupees," said the munshi; "with that sum I shall get into the palace. I have a friend there. I will make sure whether the Missy Sahib Melville is there or not. If she is, I will come back for more money. Gold will open every door."

"Follow me, you can but try," answered Shir Singh, "and then I will speak to our men and tell them the Ranee bids them be merciful. The Sikhs have not been mixed up in the massacres, but they are watched; they cannot leave the city. I will also distribute a sum of money amongst them if they will abstain from plunder."

"That they will never do," said Baasha Singh. "When did you ever know a Sikh to resist plunder?"

"They will fear the anger of the captain, Sahib Nicholson; that will withhold them," said Shir Singh.

"Give me the money and let me go; the day is advancing."

They had passed through the house, and now reached a heavy iron door, before which a Sikh was on guard.

It was the treasury to which Shir Singh alone had access. He opened the door and went in, followed by Baasha Singh.

"I will give you three hundred rupees in case of need," he said, and handed a bag containing that amount to his companion; adding, "There is no occasion to spare the rupees. Futtih Singh's daughter can pay double the price she has offered for each Feringhee, and not feel it."

"It is well," replied the old man.

They went forth together, and Shir Singh ordered a dhooli to be brought at once, saying,—

"The munshi has business in the city."

A few minutes later Baasha Singh left the Ranee's house, bidding the driver take him to the palace. In his passage through the streets the old man realised what had really been going on since early morning.

Corpses of English men, women, and children, naked and mutilated, lay about the open streets. He drew the curtains of his dhooli not to see, and the same thought which had troubled the princess crossed his heathen mind, "What is their Christ doing, that He does not save them?"

The waters of the canal which runs down the middle of the Chandi-Chouk were red with blood. More than once the curtains of his dhooli were torn on one side by Sepoys, who imagined that a Feringhee might be hidden behind them, and when they saw the old munshi they broke out into obscene words and passed on.

At the palace gates the guard stopped the dhooli. Then Baasha Singh descended and said,—

"I am the Munshi Baasha Singh, and I desire special speech with Mekand Lal, the king's secretary. Take me to him."

At the same time he put money into the man's hand.

"Mekand Lal is busy to-day, there is work at the palace; he will not see you. But pass on, you can seek him yourself."

Baasha Singh awaited no second bidding; crossing the courtyard, crowded with soldiers, he found himself immediately in the midst of such a scene as the world had never before witnessed, and let us pray never may again. Men, with swords still reeking with blood, shouted in boastful words of the deeds that had been done that morning, bidding others go and do likewise. The outer and inner courts, even the corridors, were crowded with armed men. The 3rd and 38th Cavalry regiments, the first to mutiny at Meerut, had been followed quickly by the infantry regiment; they were all here, and mingling with them was a vast rabble of Hindus and Mohammedans. The palace guards were incapable of maintaining any kind of order; the horses of the troopers were stabled in the courts, and when Baasha Singh had succeeded in slowly making his way to the Dewan Rhas, or hall of audience, he found the marble floors littered with straw, and the men, tired with their long march, sleeping thereon. This hall is open, and beyond it is a steep, almost precipitous descent to the Jumna. Its beauty is marvellous, though even at the time we are writing of it had been robbed of many of its treasures. The walls of white marble were adorned by Italian workmen, employed in the time of Shah Jehan, and were inlaid with cornelians of various colours, representing birds and flowers, the centre petals of the latter being formed of precious stones. Leading out of this hall was a small room, over the entrance of which were these words in Persian characters:—

> "If there is a Heaven upon Earth,
> It is this, it is this."

Here the famous peacock throne once stood beneath a canopy of marble supported by four pillars; it was raised so high that as he sat thereon the king saw straight through the numerous courts which converged to it. The walls were encrusted with Florentine mosaics, and many other tokens of European workmanship.

Baasha Singh was well acquainted with the place, for previous to accepting the position of munshi to Futtih Singh's adopted daughter, he had been munshi to one of the king's sons, and had resided in the palace. Bahadur Shah had eighty sons and daughters. It was with a feeling of disgust that the munshi now threaded his way through the palace, until he stood at the farther end, looking out over the Jumna, wondering where he was most likely to find the secretary and through him the prince who had been his pupil. The king lived in a wing of the palace, the princes and the women of the zenana in adjoining buildings; he determined therefore to seek for him in one place or the other. He turned to retrace his steps, but had hardly gone a couple of yards when he had the unexpected good fortune to come straight in front of the man he sought, Mekand Lal.

The secretary uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What are you doing here, Baasha Singh?" he asked.

"Seeking you in the hope you will be able to tell me where I shall find Prince Mirza Dĭrwen. I have a request to make him."

"The princes are besieged with requests, and they have in reality no power. But if I can do you a service, I shall be glad."

"It is not for me," answered Baasha Singh, "but for a man whose name I may not mention, a Kala* Sahib. He was enamoured of a young English Missy Sahib, and

* Black.

thought in the tumult of to-day to lay his hands upon her; but she has escaped him, and he has been informed that she has taken refuge with other mem sahibs and children in the palace. He intreated me to come hither and try to see the Feringhees, and if she whom he loves be amongst them, to offer a lac of rupees for her freedom."

The secretary started.

"A lac of rupees!" he repeated in astonishment.

"Yes," answered Baasha Singh, noting the greed in his face; "the royal treasury is never very full, and the princes are always crying out for money, especially Prince Mirza. I thought they would be glad to obtain such a sum."

Mekand Lal kept silence for the space of a few seconds; then he said,—

"You must first see whether the person you seek is imprisoned in the palace. Some fifty Feringhees were brought in after midday. I know where they are confined. Prince Mirza does not know."

"I will give two hundred rupees in ready money for a sight of the prisoners," said Baasha Singh. "I have the money with me; you can earn it if you choose."

"And the lac of rupees?" asked the greedy secretary.

"Will be paid when she whom I seek is safe with the person who has commissioned me to find her."

"In that case I can at least earn the two hundred rupees," answered Mekand Lal, "to start with. You are sure you know her?"

"Quite sure," answered Baasha Singh. "I have seen her daily; I was employed to teach her Hindustanee."

"Indeed! I thought you were the Ranee Azile's munshi."

"So I am, but I have many hours unemployed, and I have often taught the Feringhees; they pay well."

"Then follow me," said Mekand Lal.

He led the way through a narrow passage, which as they proceeded became darker and more contracted. At last it broadened out into a low vaulted chamber, in which were several Sepoys and palace guards.

"You'll distribute a few rupees amongst them," said Mekand Lal; "the sight is worth it."

"Willingly," answered Baasha Singh.

"You know the munshi," said the secretary to a Sepoy officer.

"How should I know him? What business has he here?" he asked.

"He is my friend," was the reply. "He has taught much amongst the Feringhees, and he is anxious to know if a certain sahib who owes him a sum of money which he has refused to pay him is amongst the prisoners."

"He is not likely to get it now," answered the man sneeringly.

"I would only make sure he is there," said Baasha Singh, advancing, and slipping a coin into the man's hand.

"You mean to say you want to see how the Feringhees, who have been our masters so long, like a taste of prison? They sentenced me to ten years; we mean to hold them until death." He laughed. "Come and see, then, if it can satisfy your vengeance."

Opening a door, he led the way down a short passage, at the end of which was another door; but this one was grated, and through the bars the munshi saw the white faces of the Feringhees. The heat was intense; there was no window to this dungeon, and all the air came through those iron bars.

"There they are!" said the Sepoy tauntingly; "draw near, and see if the man you want is amongst them."

The munshi approached, and truly the sight he saw

made him shudder. Men, women, and children, some more dead than alive, were crowded together with barely standing-room—the more fortunate leaning against the walls, supporting others in front of them. A young girl's head rested against the iron bars, the pale lips parted, striving for one breath of air.

"Water, one drop of water!" she pleaded as she saw the munshi approach, the look of pity on the old man's face reviving some hope in the fainting soul; and the little children in their fathers' and mothers' arms repeated the cry, "Water! water!"

"Better kill them outright," said the munshi; "but if their time is not yet come, give them water;" and again he offered the soldiers a piece of money, adding, "If you let them die, you will lose the pleasure of killing them. Fetch water."

The man took the coin and went.

"You shall have water," said Baasha Singh to the girl. "I wish I could do more," he added in a whisper.

"Oh, thank you!" she murmured, tears flowing down her face.

"Tell me," asked the munshi, "is there a Missy Sahib called 'Melville' here?"

"Ruby Melville? I have not seen her, thank God!" answered the girl. "She did not belong to the city—we are all city people here—but I knew her well. Why do you want her?"

At that moment the soldier appeared, accompanied by a bheesti with water-bags, at the sight of which cries broke out. Two or three jars were filled and thrust into the dungeon, to be emptied in a few seconds.

"More, more! not half of us have so much as wetted our lips," they cried.

"Then you can go dry," was the Sepoy's brutal answer.

"Come, munshi, have you found the man you wanted? If not, you must be off."

"I have found his daughter, and I am speaking to her," answered Baasha Singh boldly; "fetch more water." And he again gave money.

"Be quick, then," answered the soldier, "or we shall be caught."

Baasha Singh put his hand on the grating and slipped money into the girl's hand.

"I would help you if I could," he said, "but I have no power. This may at least buy you water."

"Thank you, you good old man," said the girl, weeping. "Wait, I will ask if Ruby Melville is here. Mr. Pearson," she continued, speaking to an elderly man, "call out and ask if any one of the name of Melville is here."

Mr. Pearson did as he was asked, but no response came.

"Farewell, then," said the munshi, and he carried away with him the remembrance of those white, ghastly faces, terror-stricken eyes, and lips dry and parched, which would never smile again.

For four days these martyrs remained in that awful dungeon, subject to every insult, with scant food, and worse, still scanter water. Freedom to go forth was promised to any one who would renounce Christianity and accept Mohammedanism. Only one woman yielded, and she was a half-caste; she and her three children were taken out and conducted to a place of safety.

On the evening of the fourth day one of the king's guards asked a lady,—

"How would you English treat us if you were again the masters?"

"Just as you have treated our husbands and children," she answered bravely.

The guard went back to his master, repeated these words, and their fate was sealed.

The following day the palace guards were sent to remove the prisoners, they were told, to more comfortable quarters. They doubted, they feared, but the dungeon had become so loathsome that they crowded out, thankful that even if they were going to their death at least it should not be there.

A rope was cast round them, binding them together, and they were driven into a courtyard, crowded with a shouting, yelling rabble come to see the Feringhees die.

It was soon over ; a hundred swordsmen cut them down mercilessly, men, women, and children, a hecatomb. So they won their crowns of martyrdom.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FRESH DIFFICULTIES.

WHILST the munshi was thus engaged, fresh difficulties assailed Shir Singh.

A message reached him from the king, demanding a formal adhesion of the Sikhs, then in Delhi, to the royal cause; if this were not immediately acceded to, the Princess Azile would be seized, and conveyed with her women to the queen's apartments in the palace, as hostage for the fidelity of her people. Shir Singh upon the receipt of this order sent to call together the principal Sikh chiefs then in the city. They met in the hall where Azile had so lately interviewed him and Baasha Singh, a dozen tall, fine-looking men with their dark, whiskered faces and glittering black eyes. They knew why they had been summoned, and almost unanimously declared their reluctance to take up arms against the British, also their horror of the murders which were being enacted.

Shir Singh laid the royal order before them. The general indignation was great, and all agreed that Futtih Singh's daughter should not be molested.

There was a moment's hesitation; then Holas Singh spoke.

"We will compromise," he said; "we will not march out against the British, but, being obliged to remain in the city, if we are left unmolested we will take

our turn on guard and otherwise do our duty to protect the city. It has been intimated to me that we shall not be allowed to leave; we are therefore virtually prisoners. When the British are once more masters, which they most assuredly will be, then we can make this clear to them. The princess is to be absolutely free; on these conditions we will give our assistance in manning the walls, and, as I said before, in defending the city generally, but we protest against the massacre which is still going on, and will have no hand in it."

All present considered that Holas Singh's conditions were alone possible under present circumstances, and Shir Singh and Holas Singh were commissioned to lay them before the king.

There was no time to be lost, so the delegates departed at once to the palace.

The king, a feeble, weak old man, entirely governed by his sons the princes, and his queen, listened in silence to Holas Singh, but dared not accept his proposition, the Queen Zeenat Mahal having expressly intimated her desire that the princess should be brought to the palace as a hostage and lodged near her.

"To that we will never consent," said Shir Singh. "The princess was placed under my protection and the Captain Sahib Nicholson's; he sent her here. I cannot and will not deliver her into your hands; and, moreover, I warn your majesty that every Sikh in Delhi, and we are numerous, will defend her. Consider the matter."

Mekand Lal, who was present, salaaming before the throne, here interposed and spoke a few words to the king in a low voice, with the result that the king agreed to accept the services of the Sikh regiments then in Delhi, on condition that the princess remained in Delhi in her own palace, and that the chiefs should engage on their honour

not to remove her; further, that she should pay another lac of rupees into the royal treasury, in consideration of which she should be allowed to retain her own guard, and should not be in any way molested.

Shir Singh would have preferred to remove the princess at once, but he was doubtful whether she would be willing to leave.

He and Holas Singh, after consulting together, decided that, situated as they were, surrounded by a far stronger force than they themselves could muster, it would be wise to accept these conditions. It was well known that there was but little money in the royal treasury, and a lac of rupees was of no consequence to the princess; but knowing the falsehood and duplicity which distinguished the royal house, and indeed every member of that palace, which was a city in itself, he required, before paying the money, a signed document stating that under the king's mandate the house inhabited by the princess was not to be entered by any one not belonging to her household or without a special passport signed by Shir Singh, as master of the household; also that this demand for money was to be final.

To the first proposition the princes raised innumerable objections.

"She will be harbouring Feringhees. We know on good authority that she has friends amongst them," said Prince Mirza.

"She has had," answered Shir Singh, "but they are all slain; their bungalow was the first to be burnt to the ground, and I believe the dead bodies were seen by some of our people. If your majesty will not grant the mandate, we will not pay the lac of rupees."

This threat was efficacious, the want of ready money being at that moment a serious inconvenience to the

royal household; but one condition Prince Mirza caused to be inserted.

If a Feringhee were found at any time in the princess's house, she should forfeit her rights.

Reluctantly Shir Singh was forced to agree to this, and then he and his companions took their departure, accompanied by Mekand Lal, who was ordered to fetch the money and pay it into the royal treasury.

Twice, thrice throughout that awful day Azile sent messengers to Shir Singh to know if he had fulfilled her desire; and the answer was ever the same—he was at the palace in treaty with the king; and Baasha Singh was also absent.

She neither slept nor ate, but paced restlessly up and down the roof of her house, whence she could see the flames rising and hear the cries in the streets, the savage "Din! din!" of the soldiers, the agonised shrieks of the still hunted Feringhees. Suddenly, her house was shaken to its very foundations, and her women threw themselves upon the ground, some crying out that they were lost, others fainting from sheer terror.

This was when the heroic nine blew up the magazine, and the smoke rolled in heavy clouds against the blue sky, darkening even the glowing radiance of an Indian summer sun.

Azile alone showed no fear; she stood erect, her beautiful face as white as her robes, her hands clasped over her bosom. Once she had claimed her woman's right to joy and sorrow, not knowing what she asked, standing alone; but now the full tide of suffering had come to her, she no longer gazed wonderingly out upon the world, she was no longer a solitary unit, her heart was full of others, of those she had learned to love: the tall, fair soldier, with his gentle voice and strong hand, and

the girl, the sister spirit, to whom her soul clung with a tenderness so new and sweet that she marvelled how she had lived so long without it. She did not know that true love neither comes nor goes; it is ever with us, born when the child is born, nurtured by mother's kisses. With her it had lain dormant, but now it sprang up with a threefold strength, powerful and strong, because it had never spent itself; pure and untouched by earthly passion as when it came forth from the great white throne and entered the new-born child. And so she stood and waited through the great heat until the short twilight faded into night; and no news came to her from the outer world beyond the sights and sounds which filled her heart with pain indescribable.

Then suddenly Baasha Singh appeared before her.

"Princess," he said, "I have sought for her you love in vain; she is either dead or has escaped—I know not which. To-morrow I will renew my search, if such be your pleasure."

Even as he spoke a cloud seemed to fall over Azile; for one second she beat the air with her hands, as if to dispel it; then, yielding to an irresistible impulse, her eyes closed, and she fell back in Rhookia's arms.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### DESPAIR.

IT was even as a match put to a haystack—the flame of mutiny burst forth, and spread over the whole vast continent of India, carrying with it death, and worse than death!

In these pages we can only tell the story of those few isolated individuals whom we have introduced to our readers. Of that galaxy of heroes and heroines which, in this hour of bitter trial and great need arose as if by magic, we must perforce be silent. Man's courage and woman's endurance were tested to the full, as in the world's history it had never been before; and they bore it, those gently nurtured women and those boy-subalterns, as unflinchingly as the veteran heroes who, stern as avenging angels, led their troops forth to rescue or avenge their country-men and women.

History will record for future generations great names and great deeds: the Havelocks, the Lawrences, the Campbells, the Outrams, before whom we bow our heads in homage; but over the nameless graves, over the well at Cawnpore, our hearts still bleed; and our souls go out in tenderness and love to those nameless ones who bore their inglorious sufferings with such sweet patience, and met their deaths so bravely! Truly their Father knoweth them all; surely their names are recorded in the great army of saints and martyrs.

In happy England the may-blossom and the lilac-trees and all the wealth of verdure were bursting over the land. The hedges were yellow with primroses and fragrant with the sweet-scented violets. In the thickly budding trees the birds sang as they built their nests in the branches or under the eaves of England's homes, so peaceful, so full of joy. In the green pastures the lambs skipped around the dams with no fear of the morrow. The month of May is pre-eminently the brightest month in England, when

> "All the valley 'ill be fresh and green and still,
> And the cowslip and the crowfoot are over all the hill."

And in this year, 1857, no one, from the Prime Minister to the humblest of her Majesty's subjects, dreamt of the dire disaster which had fallen upon that India of which they were all so proud.

Strange, almost incomprehensible as it seems, still it is a fact that the English troops at Meerut remained inactive, and no attempt was made to overtake the mutineers or to follow them to Delhi. The whole country was given up to plunder, rapine, and too often murder. Escaped convicts, Gujars from the neighbouring villages, despoiled travellers, stopped and robbed the mails, forced themselves into houses, carrying off all they could lay their hands upon. There was no authority; the shock of what had already taken place had, so to speak, paralysed those in power. The evil news of the massacres at Delhi was a fresh blow, as fugitives with their tales of horror came struggling into Meerut. Colonel Melville with the Greatheads had escaped, and if he had not been prevented doing so he would have started at once for Delhi; but the futility of so doing was made evident to him, and he remained.

General Hewitt called upon him for advice; and at his instigation it was agreed that martial law should be

proclaimed, both by the general as chief military representative, and by Mr. Greathead as head of the civil service.

For the first few days the colonel hoped that amongst the fugitives from Delhi some of his own household would appear; but in vain he watched, no one came. All he learnt was that neither Ruby nor Kate had been seen, and that his bungalow had been among the first to be fired. Who shall depict that father's anguish? One hope alone remained to him—they might have escaped to Kurnaul or Umballa; and thither he desired to go at once.

But the general opposed him; indeed, it was proved that for the present both the roads to Delhi and Umballa were impracticable. His own regiment, of which he had been so proud, in whom he had believed so implicitly, had been among the first to join the mutineers; he therefore for the present held no command, and, until he received orders, the only thing he could do was to place his services at the disposal of General Hewitt. This he did. How great was his anguish needs no telling, but then in these dark days every heart was torn; no one separate sorrow attracted more than a passing thought. The calamity was so great, that all individuality was lost, merged into one great whole! They did not know as yet all the horrors which had been or would still be perpetrated by the fiends who had risen against them; but they knew enough to make the men's faces stern as Nemesis, and to cause every one of them, soldiers and civilians alike, to swear vengeance.

How bitterly Colonel Melville regretted having brought Ruby and Kate to India it is impossible to say.

"She was all I had in the world," he said one day to Mrs. Greathead; "my wife died, I might almost say was killed, out here, and now my only child! It is a fatality!"

"Do not despair," answered the commissioner's wife; "remember how marvellously we were saved, and many

others. She may have been equally miraculously preserved."

"I have no such hope," said the colonel dejectedly; "and Kate Clifford, how shall I answer to her parents? I ought never to have left them unprotected. I ought to have sent them to Simla."

"It is no use thinking what you ought to have done. It was impossible to foresee such a catastrophe. You can but hope and trust; above all, try not to think; I know that is the hardest thing of all, but thinking, at the present moment, is enough to drive one mad," answered Mrs. Greathead.

And the colonel, like many others, knew she was right, and with set faces and stern wills they worked by day and by night to prepare that vengeance which should teach the whole Indian nation that the British dominion was not so easily shaken off.

Sir Theophilus Metcalfe and Horace Bracewell had reason to be grateful to the native who drove them with consummate skill and care away from that city of murder.

More than once, before they had cleared the immediate neighbourhood of Delhi, they came across marauders, laden with plunder; but the sight of those armed Englishmen with their rigid faces, and the tearing pace at which the carriage rolled on, kept them at bay. They had gone thus some thirty miles, the horses were getting fagged, when suddenly a woman sprang up from behind a thick clump of trees and called out in English,—

"Stop, for Heaven's sake stop!"

They needed no second bidding, for both men recognised at once Lina Humphrey. To spring out of the carriage was but the work of a few seconds.

"How did you get here? are you alone?" exclaimed Horace, taking both her hands in his. There she stood

before them, barefooted, bareheaded, her clothes torn, her hands bleeding, her red hair falling in tangled masses about her.

"No, I am not alone," she answered; "Kate Clifford is with me; she is there," and she pointed to a clump of trees. "We escaped out of Delhi," she continued, jerking out her words; "we found a buggy and horse, and drove until the horse fell down exhausted, upsetting the buggy, and Kate has broken something. She has been awfully plucky; we've been walking for the last two hours, but she can't go a step farther now."

By this time they had reached the clump of trees, and were standing beside Kate.

"Oh, Horace!" she exclaimed, "where is Ruby?"

He shook his head.

"I do not know," he answered in a low voice. Then for the first time in that awful day Kate broke down and burst into a wild flood of weeping.

"Oh, how could you leave her?" she cried. "Do you call that love?"

"My dear young lady," interposed Sir Theophilus, "be assured Mr. Bracewell did not leave Delhi as long as there was the least chance of his being of any use to Miss Ruby. Probably," he added, "she is on her way with the other fugitives to Meerut. Are you much hurt? Can you move?"

"No," she answered. "Go away, all of you; let me die!"

For all answer Horace Bracewell lifted her in his arms and carried her to the carriage. The agony she was evidently suffering, added to extreme exhaustion, resulted in a dead faint; and thus unconscious they laid her in the carriage. Strong, brave-hearted Lina Humphrey pillowed her head on her bosom, and tried to lessen for her, as

much as possible, the pain caused by the jolting of the carriage.

A very cursory examination assured Sir Theophilus that her collar-bone was broken.

"How shall we get her to Umballa?" asked Lina.

"How have you got thus far?" answered Sir Theophilus. "You poor thing, put this to your lips. I have no food to give you, and we cannot get any;" and he handed her his flask.

Nothing had passed either her or Kate's lips since they had risen from that breakfast-table. Their lips were white and dry, their tongues stiff, so as to make speech painful; they had borne the heat of that Indian summer day without one drop of water to quench their thirst; but when Lina put the brandy to her mouth the burning agony was so great that she thrust it from her, saying,—

"I cannot! Oh for one drop of water, one drop of milk!"

"Ali," called out Sir Theophilus, "is there no village or hut where we could get a cup of milk or water for the ladies?"

"Ha, sahib," answered the driver, "I will turn off; there is a village at a little distance, and I know one there who will give us what we want;" and he turned the horses' heads down a side path, which brought them to a small, scattered village, consisting of scarcely a dozen white-washed, flat-roofed, mud huts. Save for the inevitable Indian dogs skulking about, it seemed deserted, but at the sound of carriage-wheels a few naked children came tumbling out of the houses. Ali stopped his horses, and getting down went to a hut standing a little back from the main street. In a few minutes he returned, accompanied by a venerable old man carrying a wooden bowl, a few chuppatees, and some bananas.

"Oh, you good man!" said Lina, stretching out her hand for the bowl.

"Look up, Kate dear, look up; we are saved;" and before drinking herself she fed her friend.

"Is she hurt?" asked the Brahmin, looking at Kate.

"Yes," said Sir Theophilus, "she fell from her carriage."

The Brahmin gazed curiously at the party, noting their disordered appearance, so different from the usual condition of English ladies. Evidently the events which had taken place at Delhi had not reached this out-of-the-way hamlet.

In the meantime, Ali had drawn water from the well for his horses, and obtained for them a small supply of oats.

"Now, sahibs, we shall get on well!" he said cheerfully.

Sir Theophilus, assisted by Lina, had managed to bind Kate's shoulders in such a way as to render the pain she was suffering somewhat less acute.

"At Kurnaul we shall find a doctor, and then you will be all right," he said, as with rugs and the carriage cushions they managed to bolster her up.

She tried to smile, but broke down hopelessly.

"Ruby," she moaned, "my pretty Ruby!"

"Don't, for God's sake don't, Kate!" said Horace. He was ashy white, and, strong man as he was, trembled like an aspen leaf.

Putting a piece of money into the Brahmin's hand, and throwing a handful of pice to the children who had gradually come round them, Sir Theophilus called out,—

"Drive on, Ali, as quickly as you can!" And so they resumed their journey.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE PRINCESS'S DREAM.

ALL that night and all the following day the princess lay silent, motionless, as if the soul had left its earthly tenement and was wandering in other spheres.

The casket was there in perfect beauty, the breath of life came and went through the sweet lips, but there was no volition, no apparent power to will or to be. Her maidens kept silence around her, there was neither song nor laughter, and Rhookia watched.

The monotonous waving to and fro of the punkah never ceased; the incessant cooing of the doves was heard above the roar of the city, over which truly the angel of death had spread forth his wings.

It was at early dawn on the third day after the mutiny had broken out, when rapine and murder still held their sway, that Azile awoke calm and collected. There was no longer that look of anxiety and pain on her face; it was as if a kindly hand had passed over her brow, smoothing away the shadows.

"Has Baasha Singh come back?" she asked, raising herself.

"Not yet," answered Rhookia. "He has not been heard of for the last three days."

"It is well; he will be here soon," said Azile. "I hear his step; it is still far off, but it is coming nearer,

nearer, and——" A smile broke over her face. "Prepare my bath, Rhookia; I must be ready."

She rose as she spoke, and her white doves came fluttering round her.

"No," she said, "no," putting them gently back with her hand; "you could not find her!"

But still as she descended to the bath-room they hovered round her, as if pleading for pardon. As she moved through the marble passages her head was bent forward as one listening.

"Quick, Rhookia," she repeated more than once as the ayah assisted her to dress, whilst she herself with trembling hands knotted the silken girdle round her slender waist. Suddenly she started. "There, he is crossing the courtyard!" she exclaimed; but her face grew deadly pale, and, sinking on her knees, she cried: "But he is alone! alone! O Christ!" she murmured, "didst Thou not visit me and tell me not to fear, that Thou hadst sent Thine angels to uphold her in her sore trouble? 'Fear not! fear not!' I hear it even yet; no human voice was e'er so sweet. Save her, Lord Jesus, for Thy mercy's sake."

So Azile prayed her first prayer, and then she went forth, not hesitatingly, but in full confidence, with a new strength—love, human and divine, blended into one.

As she crossed the hall leading to her own apartments Baasha Singh appeared at the entrance, salaaming before her.

"It is well," she said. "I heard thee coming; but wherefore art thou alone?"

"Princess, I would speak with you," said the old man. He was looking strangely worn and weary; the expression on his face was of one who had seen sights never to be effaced from his memory.

"Follow me," said the princess, and she led the way to a small room furnished with Oriental grandeur. A close observer would have seen that her delicate limbs were trembling like an aspen leaf; and yet, so strong was the will that governed her, that her voice was steady and her face calm as, standing with folded hands, she said, "Speak, Baasha Singh."

"Princess, I have found her," he said in a low voice.

A thrill ran through Azile's frame.

"I knew that much," she said; "it was revealed to me in a vision; but wherefore hast thou not brought her with thee? Where is she?"

"If I were to tell you, you would not be any the wiser," he replied.

Azile threw back her head, and answered in a clear voice,—

"I will tell thee where she lies hidden, for the Christ she loves saw my sorrow and came to me. 'See and fear not,' He said; and I saw a ruined mosque beyond the walls of Delhi, and in one corner of the garden which surrounded it, hidden by trees and tangled shrubs, an angel stood. 'There,' He said, and pointed with His finger to where the shrubs grew thickest. I passed through, or rather my spirit entered, a deep cavern, so cunningly devised and hidden from view, that none could guess what lay behind that wealth of verdure. I entered and saw my Ruby crouching terror-stricken in a corner, whilst beside her stood a dark woman with a dagger in her hand. I heard her say, 'You are safe, Missy Sahib; they will not find you here!' and Ruby answered: 'Oh! ayah, if the princess knew, she would send and save us!' 'She could not, they would not let her; if they caught her they would kill her too, for she has blue eyes,' said the ayah.

"They did not know I was so near in spirit," added Azile.

"It is wonderful, truly, Princess; you are heavenly born," answered Baasha Singh. "It is even as you say. In the old Pathăn mosque which lies between the flagstaff tower and Hindu Rao's house I found her last night. I was returning, having searched hopelessly for some trace of your friend, but found none, when I saw creeping in the shadow of the wall a woman, evidently intent upon avoiding observation; therefore I knew she must have something to hide, so I watched. I saw her gather some roots and wild berries; and as she did so the moon shone on her face, and I knew her to be a woman I had seen at the Melville bungalow, when you were there, Princess. I was on the scent at last, but I was afraid of scaring her away, as she kept starting at the least sound, and moved stealthily in the long grass as only an Indian can. I followed, and saw her disappear in the bushes, creeping underneath them and then drawing them back, so that no one could have guessed they had been disturbed. I drew closer, and peering through saw the glimmer of her white garments. I began to fear I might be watched if I lingered too long, and yet I was puzzled to know how to make the woman aware that a friend was at hand. That she was not alone I felt sure, for with her dusky face she had no need to hide on her own account. Whom then was she seeking to screen? At last I made up my mind, and lying on the ground close by the thicket, I whispered, 'The White Dove of Amritzir has sent an olive branch; will no one come forth to take hold thereof and be saved?' No voice answered me. I continued: 'The princess weeps and moans, her heart is sad within her; will none comfort her? She weeps for her English sister, her of the dark eyes, called after a jewel!'

"This time I heard the faintest possible rustle, like a bird in the branches. 'Fear not,' I said, 'I am Baasha Singh.'

"Then a voice I knew said, 'Oh, Baasha Singh, go back to the princess and tell her Tita, the ayah, saved me; she carried me out of the bungalow, and, for a day and a night, hid me in a cellar. At last, before dawn of the second day, she brought me here, and I dare not go forth. Tita is able to get no food and but little water; we are faint and exhausted, and we live in fear. Yesterday the soldiers swarmed into the mosque, and we thought we were lost; they beat the bushes with their swords, they used foul language against the Feringhees, but they did not find us. God and His angels watched over us'; and she ceased speaking.

"I answered her with words of comfort, and bade her remain still. I said that I would return to her at night; and now, Princess, what is your will and pleasure?"

"My will and pleasure is that she should be brought here without delay," answered Azile.

"Alas, Princess, that is not possible," said Baasha Singh. "As I entered the compound I met Shir Singh, and he told me that the King of Delhi, who has now been proclaimed Emperor of Hindustan, has with difficulty been persuaded to leave you unmolested in your palace. To obtain this privilege, Shir Singh has paid out of your treasury into the royal treasury a lac of rupees, and even with that the condition has been made that if you are found harbouring Feringhees you shall forfeit your privileges."

Azile laughed a clear, low laugh full of music.

"The privilege of living or of dying," she said softly; "what matters it? Life is sweet, but who can say death may not be sweeter? My jewel must be brought

to me this night, Baasha Singh, even if I go forth to fetch her."

"That you cannot, Princess," he exclaimed. "The sights and sounds in the city would terrify you; it is a slaughter-house, and you yourself with your fair face and blue eyes could not with safety pass the portal of your palace. They would slay you, Princess, for a Feringhee!"

"Am I a Feringhee, Baasha Singh?"

"Nay, Princess, you know well you are of no race, no people; you are 'heavenly born.'"

"But, Baasha Singh, supposing I am what you call 'heavenly born,' then I am stronger than those who are born only of earth. The Christ of the Feringhees came down from heaven, and He suffered as no other man ever suffered. He lived and died for those He loved, because He was 'heavenly born.' Shall I do less, Baasha Singh?" As she spoke, she threw back her veil and stood with her beautiful face aglow in the morning light, lovely with a loveliness one sees in those pictures by old masters of the Blessed Mother, when the Angel Gabriel came to her and told her of the great love incarnated within her. "This night, Baasha Singh, I shall go forth to the mosque and bring my jewel home!"

Having thus spoken the princess slowly ascended the stairs leading to the roof.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### FALSE.

AS the princess disappeared the purdah on the opposite side of the room was pushed on one side and Tulsa the Persian entered. Though her face was as usual veiled, Baasha Singh knew by the tone of her voice when she greeted him that she was angry.

They had never been on very friendly terms, and more than once Baasha Singh had represented to the rajah that she was not all he desired as the princess's companion. But she was good to Azile, clever at all manner of embroidery, playing also on the guitar, and singing, and as Futtih Singh did not care to introduce strangers into the household, he had turned a deaf ear to his warnings, and she was allowed to remain at the head of the establishment and order all things as she would.

"Baasha Singh," she now said, "what is this I hear? You are striving to introduce Feringhees into the palace; encouraging the princess in her desire to save them from the sword of justice. Do you not know their raj is over, and that my people are coming to support the Emperor Bahadur Shah, and that ere long the throne of the Mogul will be restored to its ancient splendour, and there will not be a Feringhee left in Hindustan from north to south?"

"All this I have heard, noble lady," answered Baasha Singh; "but how can any action of mine alter the will of the Supreme? What is written will be."

"Then why do you interfere? Let things take their course. Who are you thinking to bring here? Surely not that English girl with the dark eyes! I know the princess has been weeping for her, but if she is not encouraged to remember she will forget. You know the emperor's mandate—if a Feringhee be allowed to enter the palace all privileges will be withdrawn from the princess and her household."

"All this I know," said Baasha Singh; "but have you thought, Tulsa, that though the Feringhees are in trouble now, they may ere long arise more powerful than ever? They are a strong race to be feared. Were it not prudent for us to retain some hold on their favour?"

"Make a clean breast of it, Baasha Singh, and tell me what you are plotting," said Tulsa. "I heard the princess say, 'I shall go out to the mosque and bring my jewel back.' What mosque? what jewel?"

Baasha Singh shook his head.

"She is a dreamer of dreams, a visionary," he answered.

"I know," answered Tulsa. "She has had a trance; two days and two nights she has lain insensible. When she wakes she has always strange fancies. What is the last?"

"She is only restless; would go abroad to seek her friend," answered Baasha Singh."

"In a mosque!" said Tulsa, laughing derisively.

"Of course it is absurd, but she declares that after sunset she will be carried out of the city in her palki," answered Baasha Singh.

"Impossible," exclaimed Tulsa. "Have you not heard that yesterday a Feringhee mem sahib was slain in her palki? She was disguised as a native, her white skin stained, her face veiled. A party of Sepoys met her, pulled open the curtains, saw her blue eyes, and killed her. The

princess has blue eyes, and is as fair as the fairest Feringhee maiden; why should she go forth?"

Baasha Singh hesitated; he knew quite well that now her suspicions were roused Azile could not leave the palace without Tulsa's knowledge. It might be as well to propitiate her.

"In her dream she was told to seek her friend in the Pathăn mosque not far from Hindu Rao's house; she is set upon going there. Now, Tulsa, I am your friend," continued Baasha Singh. "You know the princess has offered one lac of rupees to whoever brings her the English maiden. Why should not you do so if she be there? You would then have wealth enough to return to your own land and live at ease, highly honoured, a wealthy Parda-Mashin.* You will, moreover, stand high in the princess's favour. If the Feringhees should return, they also will reward you. Think of it."

"You are a wise man, Baasha Singh," said Tulsa thoughtfully. "A lac of rupees is not to be despised, even if you claim a share thereof," and she looked at him cunningly.

"A mere trifle," said Baasha Singh, throwing up his hands. "I am an old man, and my wants are few."

"After all it may be but an idle fancy, a dream of the princess, and the risks are many and great," said Tulsa.

"Less than in most cases," answered Baasha Singh. "The girl has dark eyes, and it were easy to stain her skin and hair to bring her in. Think it over, Tulsa, and meet me here to-morrow an hour after sunrise."

"I will think it over," said Tulsa. "Fare thee well, Baasha Singh;" and she left the room, going in the direction of her own apartments.

"False as the serpent," muttered the old man, "false

* A native lady living in seclusion

as the mistress she serves. Are not the Persians at our gates her own kith and kin? Did I not see her palki in the women's court at the palace? If she can she will betray the princess into the hands of Zeenat Mahal. But a lac of rupees is a goodly sum; she will try to win that first, even if she plays a double game. I must warn the princess."

At that same moment Rhookia glided stealthily into the room; she looked round to make sure they were alone, then she whispered,—

"See what I have found," and she drew forth a scroll of parchment closely written in Persian characters.

Baasha Singh took it eagerly, and casting his eye over it, saw that it was an offer from Tulsa to place the princess in Zeenat Mahal's power.

"Once you have her, you can make terms with the Sikh chiefs," she wrote, "and fill your empty treasury! The danger for me is great; make therefore my reward equal to the risk I run."

"Where did you find this?" asked Baasha Singh.

"I saw Tulsa pass from here down the passage leading to her room," answered Rhookia, "and the scroll fell from within the folds of her robe. She was in haste and did not notice it, neither did she see me crouching behind a pillar, so when she had passed I picked it up and brought it to you, Baasha Singh. I fear Tulsa is in league with Zeenat Mahal; she is a Persian."

"You say truly, Rhookia, but we will outwit her. Go back to the princess, and do not leave her side on any pretext. I will find Shir Singh and lay this before him: he will judge;" and hiding the scroll in his bosom he departed.

"We must catch her in her own toils," said Shir Singh, when he was shown the treacherous document. "She is

worthy to be the tool of Zeenat Mahal. They are both evil, lovers of gold and precious stones. We must crush the life out of her for the Dove's sake."

"It were better to draw her claws and make her powerless," answered Baasha Singh.

"The Feringhee maiden must not die if we can save her," answered Shir Singh. "It may be a life for a life; if so Tulsa must die."

He took a sheet of parchment which lay open upon the table where he had been sitting; it was covered with lines and figures.

"Examine that at your leisure," he said, handing it to Baasha Singh, "and come to me before sunset."

Baasha Singh took the parchment and went out, leaving Shir Singh alone.

"Nichelseyn would never forgive us if that maiden were slain through our faults, and we shall need his mercy. Besides, there are other reasons why she should be saved," he said thoughtfully, fingering Tulsa's letter.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### TO THE RESCUE.

"PRINCESS," said Tulsa, "I am willing to risk my life in your service. Say the word and I will go in my palki and bring the maiden to your palace. I will disguise her so cunningly that none shall know she is not of our race; this will be easy, seeing her eyes are dark. I think you said she was hidden at the Pathăn mosque outside the walls?"

"I do not affirm it is so, I have dreamt it only," answered the princess carelessly. "But, Tulsa, I would not have you risk your life in vain. You know the reward I have offered for the life of my friend; if you bring her to me by to-morrow's dawn I will add thereto bracelets of emeralds set in gold. Now leave me, for the heat is very great; I am weary, and would sleep. Fan me, Rhookia."

She closed her eyes, and Tulsa went out, going to her own room, where she wrote in haste:—

"If to-morrow after dawn the palace of the princess is searched, a Feringhee maiden, maybe two, will be found within its walls. Send a sufficient force to seize them, and to convey the princess as agreed upon to the apartment of the Queen Zeenat Mahal.

"TULSA.

"To MEKAND LAL, *Secretary of his High Mightiness, Bahadur Shah, Emperor of Hindustan.*"

She touched a silver bell, and a tall woman, who had been for many years her personal attendant, entered.

"Mora, this letter must be conveyed without delay to the palace, and delivered into the hands of Mekand Lal. See to it yourself."

"How can I go forth when the gates are guarded, and no one can go out or come in without a pass?" answered the woman.

"Then see and get one," said Tulsa, scowling.

The woman made no reply, but stood motionless, staring, with an almost scoffing look, at her mistress.

"Tam burra gudda hi,* will you be off?" said Tulsa.

But the woman never moved.

"Ah! is it money you are wanting, you daughter of a pig?"

"I have an old mother and a sick child," said Mora stolidly.

"I am tired of hearing of them," said Tulsa; but she tossed a rupee to her, adding, "There, begone!"

Mora turned away, but there was an ugly expression on her face, and she muttered something inaudible between her teeth. As she went down the passage, Baasha Singh crossed her path. A light came into her face, a look of sudden determination, mingled with hatred. "I will be avenged," she said, and stepped forward.

"Munshi, you are a friend of Mekand Lal. I saw you speaking to him not later than yesterday."

"And if you did, what then?" said Baasha Singh.

"I have a letter for him. Will you deliver it? I cannot leave the palace without a pass, and there are sights in the streets which turn me sick."

"Who is the sender of the letter?" asked Baasha Singh.

Mora shrugged her shoulders.

* "You big donkey."

"You can find that out," she answered. "There it is," and thrusting it into his hand, she fled.

* * * * *

It was past midnight. Three figures, muffled closely, were gliding down the passages of the princess's palace. When they reached the ground floor they came to a spiral staircase, leading to the basements, which consisted of large, vaulted chambers with grated niches in the walls.

The first figure lighted a torch, and then went slowly forward, counting the niches until he came to the twelfth. Here he paused, examined the grating, and passed his hand carefully over the iron-work, now and again pressing hard against it.

Suddenly, as if from within, it opened.

"Quick!" he exclaimed—the voice was Baasha Singh's.

In his anxiety he almost pushed his two companions through, and the grating closed of itself, noiselessly, behind them.

The slight draught, thus caused, extinguished the torch, and they stood in total darkness.

"Do not fear, Princess. I will strike a flint."

"I have no fear, Baasha Singh," said a clear, sweet voice.

A few minutes sufficed to re-light the torch, and then they saw before them a narrow, dark passage. The ground beneath their feet was uneven, the walls were damp and rough-hewn. A slight shiver ran through Azile's delicate frame; but, without hesitation, she moved forward, Rhookia following close behind.

"You understand, Princess, according to the plan I found of the house and grounds, this passage leads to the Pathăn mosque; but I cannot affirm that it is so. If you would wait till to-morrow, I could explore it."

"I cannot wait. Move on, Baasha Singh," answered the princess, and the old man obeyed.

The way was difficult; evidently it had not been used for many years. In some places the masonry had fallen in; stones and earth blocked the passage. Reptiles and unclean insects swarmed, and lizards, disturbed in their haunts, turned their bright eyes on the intruders, then glided away. More than once Rhookia stumbled and nearly fell, but Azile's hand upheld her. Like all native women, they were unaccustomed to walking. Rhookia was barefooted, and the princess soon threw off her embroidered slippers, which were indeed worse than useless, causing her to trip. When she had cast them away she walked easily, with a light, buoyant step.

At last the road broadened out into two separate paths, and diverged in opposite directions.

Baasha Singh stopped short.

"I know not which to take," he said.

The princess came to his side.

"Were they not marked on the plan you found in my father's chest?" she asked.

"I did not notice two roads," he answered, "neither did Shir Singh."

"Then we must chance it," she said.

Taking the torch from Baasha Singh's hand she held it aloft. Suddenly she started, and bent her head down almost to the ground.

"I hear water," she said, lifting herself up and pointing to the right.

"It is the river, the Jumna," said Baasha Singh. "This way, Princess," and he turned to the left.

The road seemed interminable. More than once Rhookia sat down on the ground, unable to move on; but Azile—though her feet were bleeding and her hands torn, because

at times they were obliged to feel their way, and to remove the stones and rubbish from their path—besought her so earnestly to arise, bidding her lean upon her, assuring her that they must soon be at their journey's end, that Rhookia struggled up, and so, helped by her young mistress, moved on again. At last they reached a blank wall, along the side of which were stone steps overgrown with moss and ferns.

"It is here," said Baasha Singh.

Azile was already on the topmost step, and, with her hands, was tearing away the overgrowth of damp verdure.

"Hold your torch higher, Baasha Singh," she said.

Her voice must have penetrated the barrier which separated her from the upper world, for a faint cry, as of fear, reached her and caused her face to brighten, and a light as of great joy to come into her blue eyes.

To Rhookia and Baasha Singh, standing below and gazing up at her, she was like an angel.

"Heavenly born," murmured Rhookia, crouching on the ground.

"It is I, Azile; do not fear, we have come to deliver you," said the princess, speaking in her clear silver voice, in the broken English which Ruby knew so well.

"Tita, I told you she would find us. She is underground, her voice comes from below."

In her excitement Ruby crept along the ground, putting her mouth close down and repeating,—

"Princess! Princess!"

The answer came distinctly,—

"Here, my jewel, I am here."

The spot was covered with bind-weeds, grass, and moss.

"Quick, Tita," said Ruby.

In the dark they began tearing away at whatever came beneath their hands, thus clearing a space just as Azile was doing below.

"Now, Baasha Singh, you must come; there is a stone, and I cannot lift it."

"There is no need, Princess. 'Pass your hand across the centre, and in the middle you will feel something yield to pressure, and the stone will rise of itself;' so said the guide. I must extinguish the torch, lest the light should attract attention," he added; and in an instant they were plunged in darkness.

The princess did as he bade her, and verily she felt the stone move and slowly rise, but at the same moment voices were heard in the mosque, and lights flitted to and fro. Ruby and Tita saw figures moving about as if seeking something.

"We are lost, it is too late!" exclaimed Ruby in despair. But already Azile was standing beside her.

"There!" she said in a low voice, "put your foot there."

Ruby could just distinguish the opening. The footsteps and voices were coming nearer and nearer; in her terror she did not hesitate, but let herself slip down into the darkness, missed her footing, and so fell into Baasha Singh's arms.

Azile thrust Tita forward.

"Quick," she said.

Already the bushes which grew in front of the cavern were being pushed on one side, and a woman's voice, which Azile recognised as Tulsa's, was calling out,—

"Have no fear, I have come to take you to the princess."

"Traitress!" called out Azile, in her clear young voice. "You have come to deliver us both into the hands of the wicked Queen Zeenat Mahal."

As she uttered the words she drew a pistol from her girdle, raised her hand, and fired.

Tulsa fell! Azile sprang down the opening; Baasha Singh was close behind her, he laid his hand on the stone, and it fell into its place.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A HARD RIDE.

ON May 12th, when Sir Hubert Pennington reached Kurnaul, he learnt the news of what had taken place at Meerut. Not with full details, but sufficient to horrify him, and to impress him with the necessity for hurrying on as quickly as possible to headquarters. Without taking any rest, therefore, he pushed forward to Umballa, and on arriving at that station the whole extent of the disaster was made evident to him.

He learnt that Delhi was in the hands of the mutineers, and that the old imbecile king had been proclaimed Emperor of Hindustan. But far worse was the assurance that no European had escaped alive out of the city, that men, women, and children had been butchered.

He, like many others, was at first paralysed with horror; it was incredible. A few days only had elapsed since he was strolling by Ruby's side in the bungalow gardens, and now where was she, and where were all the inmates of that happy home? His White Dove, was she safe? and he thought with fear of that fair face and those wondrous blue eyes.

Inaction at this awful crisis would have meant madness; he had but one idea, to drown thought by work.

General Anson, commander-in-chief, had just hurried down from Simla to Umballa. When informed that Lieutenant Sir Hubert Pennington had arrived and was going

on to Lahore, he sent for him, and desired him to remain at Umballa, in readiness to march with the first regiments sent forward to the relief of Delhi. "You will join Baird Smith's corps. We shall need our best engineers," the general added.

To that city of Delhi every eye, every heart was now turned. One impulse governed the whole English population throughout India—to get hold of the murderers and make them feel the whole weight of the British arm.

For once there was no plea for mercy, for once they were willing to accept the Sikh interpretation of mercy, "The fear that kills."

But the delay of even a few hours was almost more than Sir Hubert, in his then state of feeling, could well endure, and he was turning about in his mind what he could do to kill time, when he ran up against Lieutenant Hodson, who also had just arrived at Umballa from Dagshai with the first Bengal Fusiliers. They had known each other intimately in the Peshawur, and had both been trained under Sir John and Sir Henry Lawrence; there was consequently a strong bond of sympathy between them.

"Hullo! what are you doing here, Pennington?" said Hodson, as they shook hands. "I thought you were with Nicholson in the Punjab."

"I ought to have been," answered Sir Hubert, "but I went on furlough, and though I came back before my time was up, because Nicholson said there was going to be a row, he managed to give me something to do which detained me at Delhi, and now the general has ordered me to remain here and kick my heels, until Baird Smith wants me."

"Well, that won't be long," said Hodson cheerfully; "and as it happens you are just the man I want;" and,

putting his arm in Sir Hubert's, they walked down the street together.

"The general has just consented, not without an immense amount of pressure, to my making an effort to open a communication with Meerut. It is absolutely necessary for us to know what they are doing there, and whether when the troops move from here to Delhi we can depend upon being joined by the Meerut Brigade. The Rajah of Jheend arrived last night, and will give me a party of the Jheend horse, with which I intend starting this afternoon. Now, if you are not needed here, I should be glad if you would accompany me; two are always better than one, in these times, especially. It will be a sharp ride and a risky one, but I believe we shall do it."

"Not a doubt of it," answered Sir Hubert; "and the harder the ride the better. I will go back at once and get the general's leave."

General Anson willingly consented.

"Indeed," he said, "it will give you the opportunity of surveying the road from here to Kurnaul and to Meerut. You will be back in time for the march to Delhi."

"We mean to be back in double quick time, sir," said Sir Hubert; and he took his leave.

That evening at 8.30 the two lieutenants started for Kurnaul in a mail cart, and attended only by "Bux," Lieutenant Hodson's bearer. Contrary to all expectation they found the road almost deserted, and reached Kurnaul without any marked incident at 4.30. The first person they came across was Sir Theophilus Metcalfe.

Greetings were almost wordless in those days. Men feared to ask, "Where have you come from?" "Who have you seen?"

"I've got Bracewell with me," said Sir Theophilus.

"Indeed! I'm glad of that," Sir Hubert answered; "but the others?"

Sir Theophilus shook his head.

"The poor fellow is nearly beside himself," he said. "Within an hour of the outbreak he was at the Melville bungalow. But it was too late; the English servant was killed, the bungalow already fired."

"And Ruby Melville?" asked Sir Hubert between his teeth.

"We don't know," answered Sir Theophilus. "No one has seen or heard of her. Miss Clifford is here; she escaped with Miss Humphrey into the jungle, and we picked them both up. Miss Clifford has broken her collar-bone, and is lying very ill with fever and delirium. I never thought we should have got her here alive. Miss Melville may arrive at any moment; fugitives are pouring in now, but the inhabitants of the villages are ill-using them frightfully. Bracewell rescued two ladies yesterday and brought them in almost dead; they had been wandering in the jungle all these days past with no food, only roots, and very little water. Bracewell is half mad; he goes about utterly regardless of danger, his revolver in his hand, and if he sees a native skulking he just shoots him down. 'Another Pandi knocked over,' he remarks in a casual sort of way. You have heard, of course, that the Masiri regiment has mutinied, that the hill stations are threatened, and that the Gurkas are marching on Simla, murdering and plundering on their way?"

"Enough," said Sir Hubert, holding up his hands; "you are simply overpowering. After all, we can do but one thing at a time. Do you think there is any possibility of my being able to see Miss Clifford?"

"Not the slightest," answered Sir Theophilus. "You had better come and breakfast with me." And he took

them to a house where his own party had found shelter with some of the civil officers of Kurnaul.

All that day Sir Hubert and Lieutenant Hodson were preparing for their expedition. European troops and the Jheend men arrived in the forenoon ; yet notwithstanding these occupations the former officer managed to go twice to the house where Kate lay, and once he succeeded in seeing Lina Humphrey. From her he learnt how Kate had been separated from Ruby and was with Lina at the time of the outbreak.

"I do not know whether she will live," said Lina. "It is not the broken collar-bone which is the worst, but the fever. She is quite delirious, and her one cry is for Ruby; it is piteous. We brought nothing with us, absolutely nothing. People have been very good to us."

"I was afraid such might be the case," said Sir Hubert, "and therefore I have been so persistent in trying to see you. Kate's father is my oldest friend ; you must let me be your banker. I have brought money with me for you ;" and he gave her a well-filled purse.

"You need not hesitate," he said quickly, as she looked surprised. "I am bound to look after Kate, as if she were my own sister. If we get into Meerut I shall probably see Colonel Melville, and he will be relieved to know she is comparatively safe ; I still hope Ruby may have managed to reach Meerut."

"I sincerely hope you will bring that good news back with you," said Lina. "Good-bye and thank you, Sir Hubert." And so they parted, as people parted in those days, scarcely expecting ever to meet again.

At nine o'clock that same evening the expedition was to start, and Sir Hubert had fully expected to see Horace Bracewell before leaving; but he did not—no one had seen him all that day.

"Believe me, it is just as well," said Sir Theophilus; "he might have insisted upon accompanying you, and he is really not in a fit state. I do not consider him responsible for his actions."

It was three o'clock in the morning of the second day after Lieutenant Hodson and his escort left Kurnaul that an officer of one of the outlying posts at Meerut was roused by hearing the sound of firing in the direction of his advanced sentries.

He mounted and rode off immediately to reconnoitre, and was informed that a party of the enemies' cavalry had approached their post, but had retired without attacking.

When day dawned, however, the camp was surprised to see Lieutenants Hodson and Pennington ride in with their Sikh cavalry escort. They had ridden seventy-six miles without halting; for thirty miles they had fought their way through mutinous villages.

"While you are settling your business with the general I will go in search of Colonel Melville," said Sir Hubert. "When do you expect to start on your return journey?"

"A bath, breakfast, and a couple of hours' sleep, after I have interviewed the general, and I'm off again. Can you manage that?"

"I rather think so," answered Sir Hubert, with a smile. They parted, and he went his way towards the colonel's quarters. He found him in that state of silent despair which betokens only too plainly a broken heart.

"I have given up all hope," he said. "If any one had seen her, any one single person, dead or alive, it would have been at least a satisfaction; but no one has; she has just disappeared off the face of the earth. I desire but one thing now, to live long enough to get into Delhi and see some sort of justice meted out to the villains, and then surely a stray shot will kindly find me, and so it will be

finished. I am glad Katie Clifford has got out of it. If she lives, poor girl, you and Bracewell will see she gets home somehow. I have made my will, and I need not tell you I have not forgotten her. I suppose," he continued wearily, "we shall move on now; the inaction of the last fortnight has been awfully hard to bear. I said all I could from the very first to get the general to let us start for Delhi; it was of no avail, I was overruled. I must not keep you talking; go and take your bath, then we will breakfast, after which you must rest. A seventy-six mile ride at a stretch is rather a pull, even for a young man."

He spoke in a sort of mechanical way, as if his mind was far away. The effect upon Sir Hubert was most painful; but the time allowed him was so short, the necessity for rest so imperative, that deeply as he felt the whole circumstance of Ruby's disappearance, he could not attempt to utter words of consolation which he knew could be of no avail.

"My little faithful friend and confidante," he thought bitterly, "to meet with such a fate! And my princess, what is she feeling? What is she doing in that accursed city?" And once more that passion for revenge, the dominant feeling in every Englishman's heart in those dark days, rose up within him.

There are records in history of many famous rides, but scarce any that have been accomplished with greater speed and more daring than this ride of Hodson's. On the little band dashed, through a country swarming with enemies, through villages where the inhabitants rushed out of their houses at the sound of their horses' hoofs to slay them.

They had another seventy-six miles to cover on their homeward journey. As they were nearing Kurnaul, crossing one of the last villages on their road, Sir Hubert

thought he heard screams proceeding from a house, and the voice struck him as English.

"Don't you stop, Hodson," he called out. "There's murder going on in there, and if you don't mind I'll just see what devil's work they are at."

"All right!" answered Hodson. "I'll leave 'Bux' with you."

Sir Hubert dropped behind, and at a word from his master "Bux" did the same.

Without a moment's hesitation Sir Hubert rode straight for the house whence the cries proceeded. At the same moment a wretched creature, more than half naked, rushed out, followed by native men and women belabouring him with blows.

"Stop that!" shouted Sir Hubert, raising his revolver, and "Bux" followed his example. At the sound of an English voice the hunted wretch paused in his attempt at flight and looked up.

"Sir Hubert Pennington!" he cried, and made a wild dash forward; but his tormentors were too quick for him, they caught and pinned him to the ground.

"Why, it's Charlie Thompson," muttered Sir Hubert between his teeth, as he and "Bux" rode into the midst of the crowd. "Let him go, and I'll give fifty rupees for him; if not I'll fire upon you," he shouted.

The words proved magical. The villagers were only armed with sticks, and the mention of fifty rupees was conclusive. The head man stepped forward.

"Sixty, sahib," he said.

"Sixty, and some clothes on his back," said Sir Hubert. "Quick, or I fire, you scoundrel!"

"Take him, son of a pig," said the head man, kicking the wretched victim as he essayed to stumble to his feet.

"Come on, Charlie, my lad," said Sir Hubert, stooping to catch hold of the poor fellow's outstretched hand.

"The money," said the head man.

"The coat," said Sir Hubert, his pistol still cocked.

"Oh, never mind the coat," said Charlie, clinging in terror to his deliverer.

"My dear fellow, you cannot possibly ride into Kurnaul in that condition," said Sir Hubert. Even as he spoke a coat was thrown rudely over the bruised, bleeding shoulders.

"Quick, on with it, then your foot on my stirrup. I will pull you up. You are all right now." And whilst speaking Sir Hubert had drawn the money out of his pocket.

"There are your sixty rupees, you scoundrel," he said, throwing them at the head man, "but I'll remember your ugly face, and if ever I get a chance I'll hang you;" and having hoisted Charlie up in front of him, he rode away at full gallop, the rabble shouting and yelling after him. Turning round he fired his pistol into their midst; "Bux" did the same, and the crowd fell back.

"I have been in the jungle for days," said Charlie Thompson, when he had recovered himself somewhat, "without food and without shelter. I could not stand it any longer, so I ventured into that village, and they fell upon me. If only they had killed me outright! I wish they had; they killed her!"

"Who?" asked Hubert.

"Ada Fenning, the chaplain's daughter; they killed her —they did worse than kill her, the devils! And to think I am still living! Oh, my God! my God!" and with his head thrown back on Sir Hubert's shoulder, he sobbed and wept like a child. Men were very tender to each other in those days, almost as tender as women, and Sir

Hubert sought to comfort him, his own heart quailing within him, thinking of Ruby, and gradually the weeping ceased; and when at last they reached the house in Kurnaul, he thought his companion had fainted.

"Who have you got there?" asked Sir Theophilus, coming out to meet them.

"Charlie Thompson," answered Sir Hubert; "he's terribly knocked about."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" exclaimed several voices; and then they lifted him down and carried him into the house; but Charlie had his wish—he was dead.

"Where's Hodson?" asked Sir Hubert.

"He never stopped here, he went straight on to Umballa," answered Sir Theophilus.

And so it came to pass that just seventy-six hours after they had left Kurnaul, William Hodson laid the papers he had been to fetch from Meerut and his report before the commander-in-chief, who, he remarked casually, "seemed pleased at the pace."

One hundred and fifty-two miles in seventy-six hours at a stretch!

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### LOVE-BOUND.

"SEND us John Nicholson!"

The order came from the besiegers of the imperial city; and down he came, that hero, that king of men, surrounded by his brave Sikhs, those lions of the Punjab, whose land, under British rule, became in very truth "a nursery of heroes."

With his Sikhs around him, and his body-guard of Mooltanee horsemen on their wiry steeds, Nicholson dashed onward, his lofty stature, his features of stern beauty, his long black beard and deep sonorous voice marking him out from his fellows. The natives looked up to him with awe; he was to them a god, and they followed where he led. Faster they rode, ever faster, fearful lest Delhi should fall before they should stand beneath her walls. Heedless of the blazing Indian July sun they dashed on, anxious only to join the "Army of Retribution" encamped on that ridge whence our people had been driven, but where now waved once more, in full view of the imperial city, the hated flag of the Feringhee.

And now those brave men, who for three months had been battling against sickness, death, and enemies double their own in number, took heart once more, as the cry "Nicholson is coming!" passed from mouth to mouth.

But no one rejoiced so sincerely at the coming of his friend as did Sir Hubert Pennington. He had been

drafted into Baird Smith's Corps of Engineers, and the chief had immediately recognised the value of the man. Like himself, he was quick in action, full of resource, and with a thorough practical knowledge of his profession. Baird Smith had been severely wounded; he was suffering from a complication of diseases—in fact, he was a perfect wreck; but his genius and his courage were as strong as ever. To find, therefore, a man in perfect health whom he could thoroughly trust, and who was always ready for action, always on the alert, was an inestimable boon. It surprised no one that before long Lieutenant Pennington was the chief engineer's right hand. He was his shadow; but he was more especially to be found in those difficult places where, owing to his wounded leg, it was impossible for Baird Smith to go.

"If you can spare me I should like to ride and meet General Nicholson. We were long together, and were great friends," said Sir Hubert.

"I have just received a few lines from him in which he says:—

"'I am starting at once for Delhi by General Wilson's desire; he wishes to see me. The column will be at Kurnaul the day after to-morrow, and I shall perhaps, after my interview with the general, return and join it at Panipat.'"

"Of course you must go," said Baird Smith; "but come back as quickly as you can. John Nicholson is not likely to dawdle on the road. I only hope and pray he will succeed in rousing the general to action. The time for waiting is over; we must assault the city at once. I have told him so till I am sick of doing so. Oh yes, go and meet Nicholson."

And thus, as if this were the last straw to which like a drowning man he clung, he dismissed his lieutenant.

With feelings which it would have been impossible to

define, Sir Hubert rode along the great trunk road to meet his friend. Neither of them had dreamt of what lay before them when they had last met and parted in the courtyard of Mr. Spinner's house only four months back! A man's or woman's life ought not to be reckoned by years, but by the fulness of their days and hours; some would thus have lived to a good old age while yet in their prime, others would be young still, though their hair were white.

Nicholson had ridden out from Umballa with only Mirza as escort, intending, as he had intimated in his letter to Sir Hubert, to rejoin his column and enter the British camp with it. It was late in the afternoon when the two friends met and rode back together into camp.

"I suppose you have heard nothing of Futtih Singh's daughter?" asked the general.

"Yes, I had news through a Sikh prisoner," answered Sir Hubert. "At one time it appears the imperial family were anxious to get her into their power, but her people would not allow it, and declared if she were not left in her palace they would refuse to man the walls or do other military service. If, on the contrary, she were left unmolested, they would perform certain duties, and Shir Singh would pay one lac of rupees into the royal treasury. This last proposition was accepted. But, it appears, that arch-plotter Zeenat Mahal got one of the princess's women into her power, and she agreed to entice her mistress into the queen's apartments. Once there, they could have demanded a heavy ransom for her; but the plot failed—it was discovered, and the woman killed. From that time forth strict guard was kept over the princess—no one was allowed to enter her presence except her own people, and no one left the palace without the knowledge and consent of Shir Singh."

"Well, I am glad she is safe," said Nicholson. "With her fair face and blue eyes she ran considerable risk."

"She did," answered Sir Hubert, "and that is why from the first Shir Singh would not allow her to go to the royal palace or suffer any but her own attendants to approach her. It appears that the Sikhs in Delhi, at the time of the outbreak, have been obliged to perform military duty during the siege."

"Where is Colonel Melville?" asked Nicholson.

"He was at Meerut when the mutiny broke out," answered Sir Hubert. "He had gone up for the court-martial, but escaped with Hervey Greathead, and marched with the Meerut Brigade back to Delhi. He was at the battle of Hindan. His only daughter, Ruby Melville, was either killed or carried away; it has never been ascertained which. She was a lovely girl, and was as good as engaged to be married to a friend of mine, Horace Bracewell, who came out to India practically to be near her. Since the catastrophe, he is half mad. Sir Theophilus Metcalfe has taken charge of him: he is only six-and-twenty, and was a fine, healthy-looking man; now you might give him any age. He lives in camp and does all sorts of odd jobs for any of us. What he likes best, however, is shooting a Pandi; if he had his way I believe he'd kill every one of them who crossed his path."

"A feeling many of us share with him," answered the young general.

"Yes, it's about that," replied Sir Hubert. "It will be of no use attempting to hold our men in when we get into Delhi. I shall not try. Think of the sacrifice of life we have sustained! Three commanders-in-chief in as many months, and I doubt if Wilson will hold out. Our men are knocked down every day with cholera or dysentery."

"We must hurry the end on," said General Nicholson.

"Sir John Lawrence has declared to me that he cannot hold the Punjab after the twenty-first of September. He has literally stripped it of troops to come to the succour of Delhi. And then we have just lost Sir Henry; it is a grievous sorrow to him as to us all."

"It is a national loss," said Sir Hubert; "he was pre-eminently the best and bravest of men."

John Nicholson rode on. He was naturally a silent man, but especially so where his feelings were concerned. Intimately as Sir Hubert had known him, he was still struck by the great change which had come over him. There was an increase of power, a strength in his whole gait and manner, as if he were in very truth born to be a ruler of men.

They went straight to the chief engineer's quarters, and there the whole plan of defence was laid before General Nicholson. Not only Baird Smith but the commander-in-chief and officers present were surprised at the facility with which he mastered the very smallest detail, and their feeling of confidence greatly increased. Nicholson's own preoccupation was so great that he failed to join in the general hilarity which prevailed that evening, so that the younger officers were heard to complain after the head-quarter mess that General Nicholson and his big Păthan with their serious faces were decidedly kill-joys.

Early the following morning every picket in the camp was visited by a stranger in plain clothes; later, it oozed out that he was the young general. With Sir Hubert and Baird Smith he examined the defences of the Hindu Rao's house and the Metcalfe picket, and pointed out the necessity of at once taking Ludlow Castle, where the enemy had planted a battery, from which they were doing great mischief to both these posts.

"I wish I could do the work myself," he said; "but my

column cannot be up till to-morrow, and there is not an hour to be lost."

His advice was taken, and before daybreak the following morning Brigadier Showers marched with the 1st Fusiliers to the attack of Ludlow Castle and did the work, taking the guns and otherwise dismantling the place. So rapidly was this accomplished that in camp men were aroused from their slumbers by the sound of firing, and asked what had happened? When told, they turned out to meet and welcome their comrades, congratulating them on such good work, done "before breaking their fast."

In the course of the same day, to the sound of military music, General Nicholson marched into the Delhi camp at the head of his column. The notes of the bugle and the fife floated down to the rebel city, and whilst many trembled, on some dark faces a grim smile of satisfaction was visible, and more than one Sikh warrior murmured,—

"The General Nikkal Scynes Gourou is making himself heard; he is not far off."

On the roof of her house the Princess Azile stood, a smile of gladness on her face.

"It will soon be over now, my jewel," she said, stooping over a girl, who lay stretched on a couch; her face, as pale as death, was half hidden among the silken cushions.

"Listen! do you hear? It is our great Gourou coming. Baasha Singh told me yesterday that he was in the English camp, but I knew it before. I had heard the tramp of his horse's hoofs on the earth, and there was another with him," she added, lowering her voice. And kneeling down beside the couch she whispered, "Look up, my sweet, my bird, it is nearly over, take heart once more;" and gently she stroked the thin white hand, and laid her face on the pillow to be closer to her friend.

"Over!" said a plaintive voice, "there was firing long

before dawn, and the 'Din! din!' reached me even here. I am so weary," and the brown, pathetic eyes from their cavernous depths gazed up at the princess. Could they possibly be Ruby's eyes, set in a face so small, almost like a child's face, so full of pain, and with a settled look of fear in every feature?

As a mother might soothe a frightened child, so the princess gathered Ruby in her arms, pillowed her head on her bosom, and whispered to her,—

"They are all there, not one is missing. I see them in my sleep. Will you not believe me? Have we not prayed together to your Christ, and will He not hear us? The firing you heard this morning was a victory of your own people; the Mussulmen have been driven back into the city, and great fear and confusion reign in the palace. Courage a little longer, and we shall be set free."

There was such assurance in her manner, such bold fearlessness, that a look of peace crept over the sick girl's face, and her thin fingers closed confidingly over her companion's hand.

"How brave you are!" she said; and then raising herself and looking steadfastly at the princess, she continued, "It is very strange, but sometimes your face seems familiar to me, as if I had seen it before, only I cannot remember how or where."

"Who can tell, who can fathom the mysteries of birth or death?" said Azile softly, with that dreamy expression, so peculiarly her own, creeping over her lovely face, more lovely now than it had ever been before; nothing was lacking, depth and power were impressed upon it. Sorrow, care, love, had swept over that human face divine, purifying it from earthly dross as fire purifies gold.

"Now you will take your elixir," she said, as Tita approached with a goblet, containing what seemed to be

pure water; Azile, gently lifting Ruby's head, put it to her lips, and she drank eagerly, for the fever which never left her occasioned a devouring thirst, which this draught alone quenched.

Laying her back on her pillows, Azile continued,—

"You must sleep awhile, then Tita will carry you down and we will bathe, and afterwards we will remain below; you will hear less noise there."

"All you do is well and kindly done," said Ruby, "but it will be of no use. I shall die. Why do you wish to keep me, Azile?"

"Because life, terrible as it has been, is still good, still beautiful," she answered. "There is so much of it we do not know, we have not tasted; we have only put the cup to our lips, and I would quaff it to the dregs."

"You are not afraid," said Ruby, shrinking.

"Oh no, I am not afraid," said Azile. "After all, it is only a passage like a bird's flight through the air, and beyond—you know what is beyond, Ruby, for you taught me—the great Love which saves."

Ruby stretched out her arms towards her.

"Oh, my comforter, my strength," she said, "it seems to me sometimes as if you did not belong to this earth, and that one day, like your own white doves, you will take wing and fly away."

Azile shook her fair head.

"Not as long as you need me," she answered. "And I have told you the threads that bind me to earth have not been loosed; they are very strong."

"You are love-bound," whispered Ruby.

"I am love-bound," answered Azile.

She buried her face in her hands, and silence fell upon them both.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A WELCOME MESSENGER.

FROM the day Nicholson came into camp everything seemed to undergo a change. Not that by this I would cast a slur upon those men who had already fought so bravely and endured so much beneath the walls of Delhi. Heroes there were without number; some were boys, who did deeds of daring for which in days of old they would have won their spurs.

"*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*," murmured young Quintine Battye, with a smile on his face as he lay dying, so gallant, so brave, crushing back the great longing which overflowed his young heart for that glory which he knew would have been his but for the inexorable hand of death resting upon him. Life is doubly sweet to the soldier in the hour of victory when he feels the laurels fresh around his brow.

Yet daily and hourly men went forth to meet their death bravely, if regretfully, thinking of those laurels which they would have so gladly won, but which fate denied them.

It was the moral effect of Nicholson's presence which acted as an electric shock on every one that came within the reach of his influence, and a few days after his arrival this was further strengthened by the victory he won at Najafgarh.

The spirits of both officers and men had ebbed low; they now rose spontaneously. Laughter and jokes were

once more heard in camp. Even the sick seemed to revive when they were carried out to breathe the fresh evening air and look down from the ridge on that beautiful city which by its wealth of resource alone had so long defied them.

The siege work went on rapidly. The chief engineer and those under him were content now, labouring night and day.

In Delhi there were mingling elements of dissension and fear. The Sepoys began to desert in great numbers. Many of the princes, fearing the certain retribution about to overtake them, declared that "they had all along been fondly attached to the British, and only wanted to know what they could do for them." To this no answer was returned.

The day was dawning when Sir Hubert Pennington returned from a last survey of the Kashmeer Bastion. He was utterly worn out, and stumbling into his tent threw himself on his camp-bed.

"Done up, old fellow?" said Horace Bracewell, rising. "I dropped in to look you up. Sir Theophilus is down with cholera. Look here," he continued, "you must take something," and he brought him food and drink.

"I suppose I must," said Sir Hubert, sitting up; "there's a lot of work still to do. It's awfully good of you to see after us fellows, Horace," he added as he swallowed the food.

"It's all I'm fit for," answered Horace.

No one who had known the sturdy young Englishman six months before would have recognised him; he was now thin and gaunt-looking, whilst occasionally a fierce, savage expression came over the once kindly, good-natured face. His clothes were carelessly thrown on, his beard was of several days' growth. He was still ministering to Sir Hubert when suddenly they both heard a scuffling outside

the tent and native voices in dispute, and then the canvas was pushed on one side, and Sir Hubert's orderly, a tall Sikh, came in holding by the arm an old man of his own tribe.

"Sahib," he said, "I caught this fellow skulking round the tent, and I would have killed him for a spy, only he begged me to spare his life until he had delivered a message of which he is the bearer to your honour. If he lies we can hang him at once."

"The most gracious sahib knows me. I am Baasha Singh, the Princess Azile's munshi," and the old man salaamed. "I have risked my life to bear a message to you," he continued, lifting himself, and then Sir Hubert recognised him.

"You have done bravely, Baasha Singh. I marvel how you got past the pickets," said Sir Hubert. "He is a true man, Hasan; you can go." The orderly salaamed and disappeared.

Then Baasha Singh drew forth from some hidden part of his dress two infinitesimally small quills and handed them to Sir Hubert, who after some difficulty opened them and found a scrip of paper closely written over in small characters. It was in English, and the first words startled him so greatly, it was with difficulty he refrained from an exclamation, as he read :—

"I am still living, saved by the Princess Azile. I intreat the person into whose hands this paper may fall to go at once to my father, Colonel Melville, and tell him. If he be dead or cannot be found, then let it be given to Mr. Horace Bracewell or Sir Hubert Pennington. I am ill unto death, but the great love and care of the princess will not let me go.

"RUBY MELVILLE."

"What is it?" said Horace, surprised at the expression on Sir Hubert's face.

"Good news, wonderful news!" he answered slowly, and looking fixedly at him, afraid to tell him at once.

"Not of her!" exclaimed Horace, stretching out his hand; and seizing the scrap of paper, his eyes devoured the words written thereon, his knees seemed to give way beneath him, and sinking to the ground he uttered a great cry, "My God, I thank Thee, I thank Thee."

"Steady, old fellow!" said Sir Hubert in a husky voice, laying his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm all right," answered Horace, rising to his feet. "Old man, take me to her," he said in short, sharp gasps, turning to Baasha Singh.

"That is impossible," answered Sir Hubert, who had opened the other quill. "Listen to what Shir Singh writes:—

"'The time is drawing near when you will enter the city of Delhi in triumph. The princess and her companion whom she rescued are safe; it remains with you to ensure them your protection. For ourselves we ask no quarter; we are men. The Sikhs shut up in the city were forced to render certain services to the king. Willingly, we have shed no Feringhee blood, and we have helped many to escape. Judge us, gracious Lord.

"'SHIR SINGH.'"

"I will go with this to Nicholson," said Sir Hubert, rising, forgetting his fatigue; "and you, Horace, take Ruby's letter to her father. Baasha Singh, there is no chance of your being able to get back into the city. Hasan will see to you. Qui hai."

The orderly appeared.

"Take care of the old man; give him all he needs—food, clothing, rest."

"Let me provide for him!" exclaimed Horace eagerly; and he pressed gold into Baasha Singh's hand, but he thrust it away.

"I am neither a spy nor a slave," he said indignantly; "my work is not yet done." And drawing a snow-white dove out of his bosom, he said, "She must go home; have you any message to send?"

The two Englishmen looked at each other. Then Sir Hubert took a pencil and wrote on a slip of paper, "We are coming." Winding a thread round it, he fastened it under the dove's wing; then they went to the door of the tent, and in the darkness Baasha Singh threw the bird into the air. For a second they heard the fluttering of wings, and then it was gone.

"To think my darling is living!" repeated Horace again and again to himself, as he went through the camp towards Colonel Melville's tent. His manhood, his bodily strength had returned to him now that the terror, not of death, but of worse than death, was lifted from his soul.

"Sir."

"Bracewell!" and the colonel turned sharply round; he was standing in the middle of his tent, buckling on his sword preparatory to going forth to visit his pickets. He was looking strangely aged and weary; his sad, handsome face and soldierly bearing impressed an ordinary looker-on with a feeling of pain.

"Sir," repeated Horace, and this time his voice trembled so that he could hardly give utterance to the words, "she is living."

"Who? not my daughter Ruby!" said the colonel with a gasp, and leaning heavily for support on his camp-table.

"Yes, Ruby is alive," said Horace. "See," and he handed him that slip of paper, from which he had never parted.

"Read it to me," said the colonel, shading his eyes with his hand. "I cannot see." And Horace Bracewell read those lines, reverently and slowly, as we read a prayer. When he had finished the colonel looked up.

"I have prayed for death," he said, "and when I have seen young fellows falling one after the other, I have felt it hard that I was spared. God is very merciful, and we have little faith, Bracewell," and the grey head was bowed in humility. When he lifted it and his eyes met Horace Bracewell's, he went over to him, and, laying his hand on his shoulder, said, "I think we shall march into Delhi right gladly, eh, lad?"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### AT LAST.

ALL things were ready. It was the eve of the fourteenth of September, just one month since General Nicholson had ridden triumphantly into the British camp. Now the order had gone forth: on the morrow at five different points the assault on the great city was to be made. The natural position of Delhi was formidable,—seven miles and a half in circumference, enclosed in walls defended by a glacis to a third of their height, with a ditch in front of twenty-four feet, flanked at intervals by twelve-gun bastions; it was defended on the other side by the channel of the Jumna.

Difficult as the task of the besiegers was likely to be, not a man in camp would have willingly turned his back on Delhi at this critical moment. They had suffered, they had endured manifold evils patiently, thinking of this hour. It had come at last, and the remembrance of the murdered women and children was uppermost in every mind; yet the order from the commander-in-chief was distinct—no mercy to be shown to the mutineers, but women and children of whatever rank or nation were to be respected; and the order was obeyed to the letter.

The shades of night had fallen over the city and the camp, when two figures reached the edge of the ditch which surrounded the *enceinte*; they slid down the scarp and stealthily began to ascend on the other side. So noiseless

were their movements that they succeeded in reaching the top without arousing attention, and in a few seconds more had attained the wall close by the Lahore gate. The men were John Nicholson and his Pathăn Mirza.

It was a clear starlight night, though there was no moon, and the general's silhouette was plainly visible; he had attempted no disguise, and now slowly and deliberately he walked straight on, his giant figure looking supernaturally huge as he stalked round the walls.

Truly his star was in the ascendant, for that night not a Sepoy manned the walls; Sikh gunners alone occupied the bastions. As he approached they recognised him, and straightway prostrated themselves in reverential worship before the man whom they believed to be their incarnate god.

Thus making his observations, and fixing certain facts in his mind for the morrow, he passed unmolested from the Lahore to the Kashmeer gate. Unharmed, he reached the British batteries without a sign betraying him, and so disappeared.

That same night the white dove Baasha Singh had let loose dropped at the princess's feet, and throughout the palace the rumour circulated from mouth to mouth, "Nickelseyn had walked round the walls of the city; it was surely doomed!"

Azile, bending over Ruby's couch, whispered,—

"Courage, my jewel, they are near at hand."

Five columns were told off to assault five different quarters of the city at the same time, under officers whose very names inspired their men with love and reverence; but foremost among all was Nicholson.

Silently the men moved down the trenches; no bugles nor trumpets announced their coming. They waited the signal, the blowing up of the Kashmeer gate and the entrance of

Nicholson's column into the city; then the bugle rang out. Of that mighty struggle history has told the story, how, fearless of danger, one column after another forced its way into the city! Over the blackened ruins of that Kashmeer gate, heedless of all warning, Nicholson pressed forward to gain the Lahore gate, and thence the Chandi-Chouk, leading to the imperial palace.

In vain men, brave as himself, warned him that it was impracticable. Gallantly his men answered to his word of command; down a narrow lane with overhanging houses they pressed forward, wherever that tall, commanding figure was to be seen waving his sword; wherever that loud, sonorous voice rang out men leapt to the charge. From the flat-roofed houses and parapets a murderous fire was poured down upon them, and the farther end of the lane was strongly fortified by two brass guns and a bullet-proof screen. The position was truly impregnable. Once the assailants were driven back only to reform, advance, spike one gun and dash at the second. But the fire was tremendous, six officers were in turn laid low, and the men, disheartened, were falling back a second time, when Nicholson rushed to the front, summoning them by voice and gesture "to follow where their general led." They made a brave attempt to do so, but from one of the overhanging houses a bullet struck Nicholson, passing through his body. Even then in that mortal agony he was still unconquered; he refused to be moved, calling to his men to go on; *he* would lie where he had fallen until the lane was taken. It was in vain! What he required was impossible, and Horace Bracewell lifted him in his arms and carried him to the rear.

The previous night, when Nicholson had returned from his midnight walk round the walls of Delhi, he had found Bracewell waiting for him at the door of his tent.

"You have had good news to-night," he said cheerily. "Pennington has been with me and has told me. I am so glad for the colonel as well as for you."

"Thanks," answered Bracewell; "I have a favour to ask you," and he entered the tent with him.

Nicholson looked at his watch.

"I can spare you just five minutes," he said, "no longer."

"It is more than enough," answered Bracewell. "Your column is ordered to enter the city by the Kashmeer gate, I believe; will you let me accompany you as a volunteer? I am a good shot. I am captain of the militia at home, and have been with the army from the first day of the mutiny until now."

"I am not fond of taking volunteers at the last moment, but I think I can trust you to obey orders and not run away," answered Nicholson; "you can join my staff if you choose. It is now twelve o'clock; at one we shall be starting. Good-morning;" and he turned away.

Thus it was that Horace Bracewell was beside the general when he fell. Entering by the Kashmeer gate, he had thought it just possible that by some means he might reach the princess's palace; but even if that had been possible, in the ardour of battle he had forgotten all personal feelings, and followed where his general and duty led. The 52nd, to which Colonel Melville belonged, had advanced with the third column, led by Colonel Campbell, and had forced their way to the Begam Bagh, an open space, where they found themselves virtually cut off from communication with the other columns. To have attempted to hold the place during the night would have been madness. Colonel Campbell therefore fell back upon the square of St. John's, occupying the half-ruined church and the surrounding houses; but even this was not accomplished without loss. As Colonel Melville made for the church,

where his men were to be quartered, a shot, fired probably from one of the houses, struck him in the chest. As he fell his orderly caught him, and with assistance carried him into the courtyard of a large commanding house, forming the corner of the street.

It was crowded with Sikh soldiers, who, though they were armed, evidently kept aloof from the street-fighting. The colonel's own orderly and the men who carried him were Punjabis, and when they inquired where they could take their colonel, a man evidently in command stepped foward, bidding them follow him. He led the way up the steps on to the verandah, which he crossed, and entering a large hall, turned to the left, pushed aside a heavily-embroidered purdah, and stood back to let the men pass in with their burden. The colonel was bleeding heavily, seeing which, Shir Singh—for it was he—said,—

"I will send the princess's physician," and he hurried away.

The colonel was sensible, and even in his agony had caught the words.

"Find out whose house this is," he said to his orderly.

"Sahib, it is the Princess Azile's, Futtih Singh's daughter's house."

"God is very merciful," said the colonel.

At that moment Shir Singh returned, accompanied by an old man, who advanced to the couch, salaamed, and then seeing the condition of the colonel, stripped open his uniform and examined the wound.

"It is bad, very bad," he said; "maybe the sahib will die, maybe he will live—the Supreme knows."

While speaking he skilfully applied compresses to stop the bleeding.

Once or twice the colonel essayed to speak, but the agony was so great he lost consciousness. In the meantime, the regimental surgeon, hearing that the colonel was

wounded, and where they carried him, hurried to his assistance. It was the same Dr. Batson who had been so intimate at the Melvilles' bungalow, had attended Azile those few days, and afterwards had so bravely set out for Meerut.

"It is well," he said, when the native doctor made way for him, explaining what he had done; "he has almost bled to death."

By means of stimulants, the colonel gradually recovered consciousness.

"Ah! Batson," he said, "my time is up, but you must try to keep me alive a little longer. Do you know Ruby, my daughter, is here, in this very house?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the doctor, persuaded that the colonel was labouring under a delusion.

"Ask him," said the colonel, pointing to Shir Singh, who was standing at a little distance.

The doctor, to humour him, turned to Shir Singh, and said,—

"You have surely no English girl or woman in the house? We have been told they were all murdered."

"One we have saved; we could do no more, though the princess offered two thousand rupees for every Feringhee maid or woman who should be brought to her," answered the Sikh chief.

"Where is the girl you saved? What is her name?" asked the doctor eagerly. "Is it Ruby Melville? If so, fetch her immediately; there lies her father."

Shir Singh bowed his head, and left the room.

"You see I was right," said the colonel. "A message came from the princess to Hubert Pennington last night. Strange I should have come here to die!"

He lay back on the pillows, his eyes fixed on the curtained entrance through which Ruby was to come.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### AIMÉE.

"MY dearest."

Two white figures had glided into the room, one upheld by the other, and stood together by Colonel Melville's couch.

"Ruby, my dear daughter," he said, gazing at the white, set face which bent over him.

Stretching out his hand he drew her to him, and she lay encircled in his arms.

"My darling," he continued, not noticing her silence, "you can never guess what I have suffered all these months, not knowing what had become of you. Now I shall die happy. Horace Bracewell will take care of you. Go home as quickly as you can to our own England."

"Go home, father? Yes, we will go home together. Grannie will be so glad," said Ruby, nestling closer to him.

A cloud crept over the colonel's face.

"My poor child," he said, "have you suffered so much that you have forgotten? *I* am going home to grannie, Ruby, but you, my darling, have still to live your life on earth, to live and love."

"Not without you, father," she cried, raising herself. "You left me once——"

A look of terror overspread her face, and a stifled cry escaped her lips.

"'HUSH, MY JEWEL, HUSH,' AND AZILE THREW HER ARM ROUND RUBY." [p. 295.

"Hush, my jewel, hush," said a clear, sweet voice, and Azile threw her arm round Ruby.

The colonel started, looked at the white-draped figure, and asked almost sharply,—

"Who are you?"

"Do you not know the White Dove, father?" said Ruby, clinging to her. As if the contact soothed her, the fear faded out of her eyes, and a smile, piteous in its very sadness, played round her lips. "My White Dove, see how beautiful she is; she too must go home to grannie."

As she uttered these words Ruby threw back the saree, and the princess stood with face uncovered, her blue eyes uplifted, and a tender, serious look on her delicate lips. The colonel, raising himself, gazed at her in wonder. A strange yearning gathered round his heart. Was he dreaming, or was it a vision from another world? He bent forward.

"My wife!" he said, "have you come to fetch me?" and a smile of ineffable bliss lit up his face.

"Ruby, it is your mother," he continued; "and yet—and yet——" A puzzled, troubled look swept over his brow. "Speak, my darling, speak!" he murmured. "Oh, my Aimée!"

He held out his arms to her. Azile bowed her head, but made no movement; Ruby drooped, and would have fallen but for Azile's support. They brought a couch and laid her on it.

"Doctor, what does it mean?" gasped the colonel, pointing to Azile. "She cannot be my wife; she is so young, and we have been parted so many years, and yet no one was ever like her—not even Ruby. It is wonderful, wonderful!" he murmured, speaking slowly, and never once taking his eyes off Azile, evidently trying to

collect his thoughts. "Batson, is it a delusion?" he asked feverishly; "do *you* see her?"

"I see the Princess Azile, Futtih Singh's adopted daughter," answered the doctor. "Calm yourself, my dear sir; it is an imaginary likeness."

A strange look came into the colonel's face; he repeated slowly,—

"'Futtih Singh's *adopted* daughter!' Where did he find her? Can no one tell me, Princess, who you are?"

"I do not know," said Azile, "ask Rhookia; I am heavenly born. Rhookia," she added, turning to her ayah, "tell the sahib what you know?"

The woman came forward, trembling.

"Speak to her, Batson," said the colonel, lying back exhausted; and the doctor asked Rhookia in her native tongue where she had found the Princess Azile.

A terrified look came into the woman's face, and turning to Shir Singh she cried out, wringing her hands,—

"My lord, as thou knowest, bade me never speak of it on pain of instant death."

"But *I* bid thee answer. Speak!" said Azile, springing to her side. "Speak!" and her blue eyes flashed fire.

"Princess," said Shir Singh, "I will speak for her. Dacoïts from the hill country in the neighbourhood of Najar had fallen upon an English camp and robbed it; the native servants all fled. There was no sahib, only a mem sahib there, and she died of fright; when her servants came back they found her, but life was gone. Her husband returned two days later and buried her; a stone cross marks the spot. A woman, evidently the mem sahib's ayah, was found a mile from the camp by Rhookia. She had fled, and a shot had pierced her in the breast; she dragged herself into the jungle near a village and there died. Hidden in her arms was an infant, born before its time. Rhookia, guided by

some instinct, took it and laid it in her bosom, beside her own child, and she loved it; but she feared her husband would return and slay it, so she brought it to Futtih Singh, and his soul yearned over the child. He sent it and Rhookia to his castle, and as the child grew so his love grew, as thou knowest, Princess; for thou wert this child, and thou becamest to him as his own flesh and blood. The General Sahib Nicholson knows all this; the rajah told him before he died."

"How long ago did this happen?" asked the colonel, who had drunk in every word, though his eyes never left Azile's face.

"Sixteen years ago last month of March," said Shir Singh.

"Sixteen years ago," replied the colonel, speaking with difficulty, "I was named chief commissioner of one of the newly-annexed districts some forty miles to the north of Najar."

He paused to gather strength, then continued, speaking in a low voice, very quickly, as if time pressed,—

"I did not wish my wife to accompany me because of her health, but she pleaded so earnestly to do so, and since our marriage we had never been parted. She was so particularly well, and the child we hoped for was not expected for some time. 'If she remained behind,' she argued, 'she would have to follow me later alone,' a far worse alternative. So arrangements were made, and we started together. I made things as easy for her as possible, and all went well till messages arrived from my district saying my predecessor had suddenly died, that disorder was rife among the native chiefs, and urging me to advance more rapidly. I hesitated, but the country through which we were passing seemed perfectly quiet. I had a large number of native servants, all armed, in

charge of the camp, and my sweet, brave wife laughed at my fears.

"'Ride on in front,' she said, 'we will follow more slowly; you can even come back and meet us when you have seen how things stand.'

"I never saw her in life again! A party of Dacoïts attacked the camp; the cowardly native servants fled. When they returned their mistress was lying in her tent dead—not killed nor wounded, but just dead. They rode to fetch me, because they could not bury her until I came; but it was too late, they had covered her up, I dared not even look upon the face I had so loved; and so I laid, as I thought, mother and unborn child in the same grave. The day after, her ayah was found dead in a ditch; she too had fled."

Exhausted, the colonel sank back.

"Help me," he said, gasping for breath.

The doctor put ice into his mouth and eased him as best he could; to bid him be silent was useless.

Ruby lay still, her eyes open with that same look of terror in them. Did she understand?

"I know now," continued the colonel, "that a living child was born, and she, my Aimée, must have died from sheer terror and exhaustion, whilst the ayah fled with the infant, hoping to save it. She whom you call Princess Azile is that child; she is her mother's living image," and stretching forth his hand it rested on Azile's head. "There was none other like her, none! none! I never thought to see her face again in this world, but now—Ruby, she is your sister; love her, love her tenderly, thinking of all the love she has missed."

His eyes filled with tears.

"Love, love," repeated Ruby dreamily, rising and creeping close to Azile; "if I love her she will die."

"No, she will not," said the colonel. "I am going, Ruby, but you will not be alone; this is your mother's gift to you. Oh! my children, call me father, kiss me, so that I may tell your mother when we meet that I have held *our children* in my arms."

He spoke with passionate eagerness, clinging to that life which he felt was fast slipping from him.

Tears were dropping slowly from Azile's eyes as she bent down and whispered,—

"Father, mother, you have always loved me, you will love me still, there as here. Love cannot die."

She kissed him, and he held her, not letting her go; but turning to Ruby, he said pleadingly,—

"And you, my first-born?"

But Ruby did not move, her eyes shone strangely with a look of terrible fear.

"Poor child," he whispered softly, "she is very ill, my sweet Ruby."

Then once more he looked at Azile with fond pride.

"How beautiful, how fair and strong you are, just as my Aimée was when she came to me on our marriage-day. You will care for Ruby; you will stand fast together?"

"I will care for her, father," said Azile.

Suddenly the colonel, still holding Azile's hand, addressed the doctor,—

"Batson, there is my diary with dates and particulars—Shir Singh says the rajah told Nicholson—then there is the woman who found her. She *is* my child; remember there is no mistake; make it clear to all."

"I will do my best," said the doctor, deeply moved, not choosing to grieve him by saying how difficult the facts might be to prove.

Satisfied, the colonel lay breathing hard, his eyes growing dimmer and dimmer, but still fixed on the princess.

"So good of you to come and fetch me, Aimée dear," he gasped; "the parting has seemed so long, so very long, but it is over now. The children——" His voice failed. "Aimée, my love, I am coming," he called.

A smile broke over his face, his head drooped, and he passed away to that country where all things are made clear.

Standing by him, Ruby laughed; the sound rang out in the chamber of death, and those who heard it shuddered.

"Gone! gone!" she shrieked. "Father, they are coming! Save me."

Her whole face was convulsed with fear, and she fell heavily to the ground, writhing in agony.

Rhookia raised her—she was so frail, not heavier than a child—and followed by the princess they went forth.

"She will die," said the doctor to Shir Singh.

"She has had these fits ever since the night the princess saved her life," answered the Sikh; "when they are over she is as one who knows not what she says or does, she is mad. Yes, she will die."

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### NICKELSEYN'S UNSEEN GOD.

SO terrible had been the losses, so partial the occupation of the city, that the commander-in-chief, General Wilson, was tempted to withdraw his troops. Nicholson lay in his tent dying, and Neville Chamberlain, severely wounded and unable to be present, watched, from the summit of Hindu Rao's house, the events of the day. Now both these brave men determined to resist such a proposition with all their might.

Beside Nicholson's stretcher, within reach of his hand, were placed his Bible and his revolver; laying his hand on the latter, when he heard of the general's hesitation, he exclaimed with the passion of despair,—

"Thank God, I have strength yet to shoot him if necessary!"

To be laid thus low with full consciousness of his own power, to see the hours slip by, and still to be apparently no nearer the consummation, was inconceivable mental agony to such a man, aggravating his physical pain. He knew he was dying.

"But not till Delhi is taken," he said to Neville Chamberlain, who had at last dragged himself into his friend's tent.

All around, by night and by day, those Sikhs, who had volunteered to follow him, kept guard, besieging the doctors with questions, striving to penetrate into his

presence. So great was his agony that he intreated them to leave him in peace, or at least to retire so far from his tent that their voices should not reach him. They would obey for a time, but a magnetic power drew them towards him, and again they surrounded the tent.

With a supreme effort Nicholson raised himself, took his revolver, and fired through the tent walls.

"I am not yet dead," he said, falling back.

"Wah, wah! general sahib ke hookum hai," * said one of the chiefs, and they drew back in silence.

Baird Smith seconded Chamberlain and Nicholson, and they morally forced the general to hold the place.

Every power of modern engineering was brought to bear upon the taking of the city. On the fourth day the King of Delhi, his zenana, his sons and nobles fled from the palace, and took refuge in the tomb of Humăyun. He refused to accompany the rebel army under Bakt Khān into the open country, and thus to continue the war. On the twentieth of September the gates of the palace were blown in, once more the British flag was hoisted, and the Mogul driven forth. The victory of the West over the East, the Christian over the Mussulman!

The battle was over, the victory won, and for John Nicholson, also, the end had come.

"It is finished." Life's page closed, and on the morning of the twenty-first he breathed his last.

"He has kept himself alive the last two days by his own indomitable will," said Dr. Batson, as he stood with Neville Chamberlain, the dead man's best friend, looking down upon that grand face, growing in the first hour after death calmer and nobler than it had ever been in life.

"There was no one like him, no one," said Chamberlain; "he cast a spell over men's hearts, and there was

* "Oh, oh! there is the general's order."

nothing he could not do. He was a king over us all, we recognised and loved his power."

A few hours later, amidst dead silence, the body was borne forth to its burial, and Neville Chamberlain, a hero himself, followed to his last resting-place the man he had loved as David loved Jonathan. Strong men wept aloud as they stood around that grave; the men of the Mooltanee horse threw themselves on the ground and sobbed as if their hearts were breaking. For him they had left all! they had taken no pay, they acknowledged no other master, and a few days later they rode out of camp back to their hill country. But two Sikhs, head men of the tribe, devoted followers of Nicholson, Sidar Chuttur Singh and Lal Singh, declared life was not worth living when he their leader ceased to be, so they shot themselves in the presence of their companions. Other Sidars were about to follow their example, when Shir Singh stepped quickly forward and spoke thus :—

"Nickelseyn always said he was a man like as we are, and that he worshipped a God whom we could not see, but who was always near us. Let us learn to worship Nickelseyn's God."

"How can we do that when he who might have taught us is gone from amongst us?" said the Sidar.

"Wait till this war is over, fight for the cause for which Nickelseyn died, revenge him, and then when we go back to our place we, 'the kingless tribe,' will seek teachers. Many of you dwell on the lands belonging to the Rajah Futtih Singh, and bequeathed by him to his daughter, the Princess Azile, the White Ranee. If you ask her she will find you teachers."

"It is well; we will do as you say Shir Singh," answered the second Sidar in command. "When the time comes we will seek to know Nickelseyn's Unseen God."

## CHAPTER XL.

### LOST.

DURING all those days, from the fourteenth to the twentieth, no section of the British Army had been so heavily worked, so constantly to the fore, as the Engineer Corps. Even before the assault the preparation had been most arduous.

Lieutenant Sir Hubert Pennington had been in the very thickest of the fight. He had assisted at the blowing up of the Kashmeer gate, and with Captain Alexander Taylor, and a picked body of men, had worked their way through the houses of the city to the Burn Bastion, and so on and on unceasingly, always in advance.

"Don't let us give in, not an inch," he repeated again and again; and we know his chiefs were like-minded.

When he could catch a few minutes' rest he generally managed to find his way to John Nicholson's tent. His grief at the impending loss was very great.

"It is hard, very hard," he said to Neville Chamberlain one day, after an unusually hurried visit. "It takes the strength out of one's arms to see him lying there. We shall never see his equal again."

Once when he was sitting beside the dying man, telling him of some incident in the day's work, he said suddenly,—

"Have you heard Colonel Melville was killed yesterday?"

"Yes; Batson told me," he answered. "It's a curious

story altogether. If you have not heard it, make Batson tell it you. I cannot. You will find papers relating to the Princess Azile among my things; the duplicates are at Lahore. You must see to that business," and he dismissed the subject. His mind was so full of other matters—to him, of far greater importance.

Once he had said in his zeal for the public service,—

"When our Empire is at stake, women and children cease to be of any importance at all," and to the last his thoughts were for "his God, his Queen, his Country!"

As Sir Hubert went back to his work, he thought, "I wonder what Batson knows? I hope the colonel saw Ruby before he died." But personal thoughts, personal feelings, were soon thrust into the background; the calls upon him were so many and so urgent, and he never happened to come across either Dr. Batson or Horace Bracewell. The latter sought him more than once, but failed to find him.

His duties on the day John Nicholson was laid to his rest were such as to prevent him attending the funeral, and it was late at night when, at last, utterly exhausted, he entered his tent, and bidding his orderly keep strict guard, and let no one disturb him for at least two hours, he lay down and fell into a heavy sleep.

When he awoke, a faint streak of light was filtering through the canvas, and he saw a figure standing in the middle of the tent. He knew at once who it was. He lifted himself, and said, "Princess Azile."

She looked at him with such sadness in her eyes, raised her hand with a gesture of adieu, then moved to the entrance of the tent, lifted the canvas, and disappeared.

He called his orderly.

"Have you seen any one leave the tent?"

"No one has either entered or left the tent, your honour," answered the man.

Sir Hubert rose, took his bath, dressed himself, and went out, directing his steps towards the city; he entered over the ruins of that Kashmeer gate, the taking of which had cost so many lives. The sentinels knew him and let him pass, and without hindrance he reached the square in which stood the Princess Azile's palace. Suddenly Horace Bracewell stood before him, looking ghastly in the early morning light.

"They are gone!" he said.

"Gone!" repeated Sir Hubert. "Who are gone?"

"The Princess Azile and Ruby Melville," he answered, "and no one knows when they went or where they are gone. I saw Doctor Batson last night, and he told me Ruby was mad and dying. I have spent the whole night wandering about, and came before dawn to the palace to inquire for her. I was told that both she and the princess were gone no one knew where. I must find her, and you must help me."

Sir Hubert was silent, he did not know what to say.

"To take her away dying—why should the princess do that?" he said at last, "and by what right?"

"You have heard who the princess is?" said Horace.

"No. Who?" asked Sir Hubert quickly.

"Colonel Melville's youngest daughter, Ruby's sister," answered Horace. Then rapidly he told of that deathbed scene, adding, "And after he was dead they found a medallion round his neck, containing the portrait of a girl so like the princess it might have been herself; there could be no mistake."

As he finished speaking, before Sir Hubert could answer him, the palace gate opened and Shir Singh appeared.

"Sahib Pennington," he said, "I was coming in search of you. Will you enter?" and he held the gate open for them to pass into the courtyard of the palace, and thence

into the great entrance hall; there he stopped, salaamed, and spoke.

"Sahibs, those you seek are no longer here. The sahib doctor said there was no hope, that sorrow and fear had broken the heart of the Missy Sahib, and the princess, her sister, wept and mourned for her. For two nights and days I have not dwelt in the palace, I have been with Nickelseyn. I returned two hours ago, and was told that the princess's maidens were weeping and wringing their hands because their mistress had departed from amongst them. Rhookia and Tita are also gone, and on a table I found these two parcels addressed to you; maybe they will tell you whither the maidens are gone." And he handed the two packets tied with silver thread to Sir Hubert. One was addressed to him, the other to Horace. The first ran thus:—

"I go to seek Nickelseyn's God, and to pray your Christ to give light to the dying, sight to the blind. We two go forth together in faith and love. Pray for us.

"AZILE."

Horace's missive was in the same handwriting, and ran thus:—

"Ruby Melville bids you farewell, because she is weary and her spirit seeks for rest and peace. She thanks you for your faithful love and bids you not despair—she may yet return to you whole in mind and body. God is very merciful. The enclosed parcel is for Kate Clifford if she be still living; if not let the contents be given to the brothers and sisters for whom she lived and worked."

In Sir Hubert's letter there was also an enclosure. Wrapped in soft muslin he found a medallion with a delicately painted portrait of a girl, so like Azile, that he

could not for one moment doubt who it was meant to represent. Engraved round it was the one word "Aimée."

The two men looked at each other.

"What can we do?" asked Horace.

"Can *you* help us, Shir Singh?" asked Sir Hubert.

"I speak the truth, sahibs, I do not know where they are gone," he answered; adding, "But the princess is wise and tender. Trust her!" The three men went forth together, and all that day they sought in vain for some trace of the fugitives, but found none.

The following morning Lieutenant, now Captain Sir Hubert Pennington, received orders to join at once a column under Lieutenant-Colonel Greathead, to intercept and cut off the rebels, and then to push forward to the relief of Agra.

"I am thankful to get away from Delhi," he said to Horace at parting, "and I advise you to go home as quickly as possible, even supposing you came back again. With the country in its present condition you are not likely to find those two; the princess has means at her disposal, and devoted followers who will do her will. If I live to see this mutiny crushed out, which is not very likely, then I too will scour the Punjab until I find my 'White Dove.' Farewell."

They wrung each other's hands, and so parted.

Horace Bracewell could not tear himself away from Delhi; he hoped against hope. He witnessed the return of the captive king, and of the wicked Queen Zeenat Mahal and their son. He saw the dead bodies of the princes shot by Hodson brought in and exposed on that public place where the women and the children had suffered their martyrdom. He sought by money, by spies, by every possible device to discover the princess's and Ruby's retreat; but in vain. To satisfy him Shir Singh permitted

him to go through the palace, into the very room the sisters had so lately occupied. The doves cooed on the house-roof, and fluttered restlessly to and fro, but the hand that was wont to caress them came not.

"You had better go away," said Doctor Batson. "You are killing yourself, and I assure you on my honour I believe Ruby Melville to have been past all human help; to remove her must have killed her."

But Horace would not be convinced.

"I shall find her," he said obstinately.

"Not in this world, not even her grave," thought Doctor Batson; but he kept silence.

So Horace determined to go to Umballa and see after Kate Clifford and Lina Humphrey. "I must try and get them down to Calcutta, and send them home," he thought. When he reached Umballa he found them fairly well. Throughout those weary months of anxiety and waiting they had shown themselves brave, true-hearted women, doing good work amongst the sick and wounded. All the hardness had left Kate's face; wherever there were weary mothers and little children there she was to be found. They clung to her, she understood their needs, their pleasures, and their pains so well; they loved her and she loved them.

"I did not see, I did not understand," she said once to Lina, "but God trained me for this hour." In the privacy of her chamber she shed bitter tears of agony.

"Oh! my Ruby, my sweet Ruby," she would weep and moan. "I envied her her wealth, her beauty, even Horace Bracewell's love. I used to say she had everything and I nothing."

When she opened the parcel Horace gave her, it was found to contain money orders upon different banks, sufficient to make life henceforth easy to her. The

money was transferred to her name by Azile, daughter and heiress of Rajah Futtih Singh. To this gift was added a bag filled with precious stones, a fortune in themselves, and as she gazed at them her tears fell fast.

"I so coveted wealth," she said, "and Ruby knew it, and now I would give all, everything, to hold her hand in mine again and be penniless. Is there no hope, Horace?"

"The doctor says not, but I still believe there is," he answered. "And now, Kate, when will you be ready to start for Calcutta? There is a party leaving next week; will you go? The journey will be difficult, but it is practicable, and we shall have a strong escort."

Kate was silent for a few minutes; then she answered,—

"I will not go at all at present, Horace. There are so many here who cannot go and who need my help—widows and orphans. I dare not leave them. I will remain till the hot weather. This money which has been sent cannot be intended all for me; I must give some of it to others. Ruby would wish it, Ruby would have done so."

"I will stay with you," said Lina Humphrey.

"Very well, you must do as you think right," said Horace; "only write at once home to your people and tell them. The mails are so irregular it may be months before they get your letters."

So it came to pass that in the month of March in the following year Horace Bracewell, Kate Clifford, and Lina Humphrey went on board at Calcutta, homeward bound. Through all those months Horace never ceased his search for Ruby. Kate had grown to think it hopeless, but he never lost heart; it seemed to him so impossible that his beautiful Ruby should have passed out of the world!

"I will take you home, see my people, and come back again," he said; and he did so. Faithful heart, true as steel! Would he meet with his reward here or hereafter?

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE WHITE DOVE'S MISSION.

SLOWLY, hand in hand, two slender, white-clad figures wandered beside a "tal," or lake, lying in the basin of the mountains, some 6,200 feet above the sea. On all sides arose beautiful hills wooded from their summits down to the water's brink. A large grey-stone building, half house, half fortress, was situated on the slope of the hill-side, and scattered around were some forty smaller native dwelling-houses.

"You are silent to-day, Azile," said an English voice. "Has anything grieved you?"

"Nothing has grieved me, but I am anxious. I hear sounds of footsteps coming over the mountains. Ruby, do you think they have found us?"

"And if *they* have, surely the time has come. Your work is done, my sweet sister; we can go home. The cloud has been lifted from my spirit, the terrible fear has died out."

"And you will leave me, Ruby?"

"I will never leave you, my little sister; where I go you will go, my country will be your country. Did I not hear, as in a dream, my father bid me love you with a great love, remembering all you had missed? Moreover, through all these long months have not you tended me? If I am living, if my spirit has come back to me, free and

untrammelled, it is you, and you only, to whom I owe it all."

"It was *your Christ* who sent the healing," said Azile softly.

"True, it was *our* Christ," answered Ruby; "looking up at Him, His Love entered into your soul, Azile, and His and your love saved me."

Throwing her arms around the slender figure, the dark eyes of Ruby Melville, calm and fearless now as when she stood on the green lawn of Woodlands, gazed into the deep blue orbs of Futtih Singh's adopted daughter.

"Hark! They are coming. I told you so. For many days I have heard them drawing nearer, nearer. See!"

Azile pointed to the last of the many ranges of mountain-ridges descending to the "tal." Ruby looked and saw the figures of two men looming against the horizon.

"They have found us!" she said triumphantly.

The colour came into her face and the joy-light into her eyes; she watched with a strange throbbing at her heart as the figures came rapidly on. It seemed to her that they were running swiftly, leaping down the mountain-side. So engrossed was she in watching that she did not perceive Azile had left her side, and that she stood alone.

Down they came, guided by the fluttering of her white garments, and almost before she thought it possible Horace Bracewell was beside her, clasping her in his arms, and covering her face with kisses.

"Oh, Ruby!" he said, his voice quivering with emotion, "how could you?"

"Hush!" she whispered; "thank God who sent His angel to drive out the demon of fear, and to make me whole."

As she spoke she looked to where Azile had stood.

"You have scared the White Dove away," she said; and, holding out her hand to Sir Hubert Pennington, "Come, I will take you to her."

She paused, then asked quickly, as if she feared her question would be negatived,—

"She *is* my sister?"

"She is indeed," answered Sir Hubert. "I have proved by official papers your father's appointment, and how he left your mother in camp, a mile from the place where the dead ayah and child were found. Moreover, the stone cross over the grave still marks the spot with the words engraved thereon, 'Aimée, the beloved wife of Robert Melville.' Then there are your father's letters to his mother, in which he tells her how anxious he is to reach his destination, and the last despairing cry, 'Both gone! Wife and unborn child. I am half mad!'"

"Poor father!" said Ruby. "But it is over now, and he has found her again. Come!" and they went towards the house.

"Azile, my sweet sister, you are an English maiden, and your lover is waiting for you. He has sought for you by sea and land; he has surely won your love. Will you not come to him?"

Ruby twined her arms round the girl, and coaxed and petted her; she had found her lying on her couch weeping bitterly.

"Nay, nay," she said, "you must not hide your face; it is too fair. You need not fear his gaze."

She pushed back the white saree, and smoothed the light hair from the broad white brow.

"My mother's face," she added softly, tenderly kissing her. "Come, my White Dove," and she led her forth to where Sir Hubert and Horace impatiently awaited her coming.

It was over, they had met and clasped hands, and perfect love cast out even the shadow of fear. Joy, that intense, unreasoning joy of united souls, was theirs, all strangeness passed away, and when they parted that night it was with the glad thought that they would meet on the morrow.

"How did you find us?" said Ruby the following day, as she walked by Horace's side on the border of the tal.

"We had reached Peshawur," said Horace. "Oh, Ruby, you have led us a fine dance, but you are more beautiful than ever," he added, drawing her to him. "I declare I was frightened to go to sleep last night, lest you should both turn into doves and fly away again."

"Go on," said Ruby, with just a touch of her old peremptory manner.

"I was saying we were at Peshawur," he continued, "almost in the last stage of despair, when we were told that a strange ceremony was to take place that day: a whole tribe of Sikh warriors, followers of John Nicholson, were to be baptised; that for six months they had patiently attended the teaching of the missionaries, and had now come in a body, desiring to be admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ. 'We have found Nickelseyn's God,' they said, 'and henceforth we will follow Him.'* We went at the invitation of the chaplain to witness the ceremony. I think I have never seen anything more touching. The first to present themselves were our old friends Shir Singh and Baasha Singh. Of course immediately after the ceremony we got hold of them, and the first words Shir Singh said with grim humour were,—

"'Sahibs, he is the guilty one. I told you the truth. I did not know where the White Dove had flown.'

* This true incident is the only one on record in which natives of India in a body forsook their own faith on merely disinterested grounds.—*From "Reginald Wilberforce."*

"'But you know now,' said Sir Hubert.

"'I am going thither to-morrow with Baasha Singh,' he answered. 'It will take twenty days to reach the Mynee Tal. Will you come?'

"So, Ruby, we have traversed plains, we have crossed swamps, we have shot tigers and leopards, we have come over a vast sea of mountains, and at last we were told yesterday, as we doubled the ridge and saw the lake shining like glass in the valley, 'They are there!' Oh! my darling, you will never know what we felt at that moment."

Ruby made no answer, she was weeping; then she clung to him and whispered,—

"We will go home, Horace."

And he was, at last, satisfied.

"Sahib," said Baasha Singh to Sir Hubert, "the English doctor said she would die, that she was mad. I knew she would die if she stayed in the midst of those sights and sounds which terrified her very soul to the verge of madness, so I told the princess of this lake in the mountains, possessed of healing powers, and that if she could bring her here, and separate her from all the world for a time, her soul would come again to her like the soul of a little child. 'Then we will go,' she said. I gave the Missy Sahib a sleeping draught, and I told a band of faithful Sikhs that the princess was in great danger and must be taken out of the city secretly. In the night they fetched the two maidens and their women, Rhookia and Tita, and by secret passages carried them far away into the open country. We were two months on the road; sometimes for days together we rested, but at every unusual sound the sick maiden would utter cries as of great pain, and no one but the princess could soothe her. At last we reached this fortress, which is the princess's own, and, as you see,

in the peace and quiet the English maiden's soul has come back to her, the evil visions have faded, and she is healed."

"But could not this have been accomplished with less mystery, and in a less out-of-the-way place?" asked Sir Hubert.

"Not when the whole country was in arms," answered Baasha Singh. "Peace, no sight or sound which could remind her of the past was absolutely necessary, and then I said truly, there *is* a mountain spring close by, the waters of which soothe and strengthen both mind and body. Plants also grow on the hill-side, which I prepared for her, and gradually she stepped out into the sunshine once more without fear or trembling, and the sights and sounds of earth no longer filled her with terror, but with joy."

"It has taken nearly two years," said Sir Hubert regretfully.

"Two years," said a gentle voice beside him. "Have they not been well spent? Look," and Azile pointed to Horace and Ruby, standing close together by the tal. "They love one another; *she* had forgotten what love meant—perhaps she had never really known," she whispered softly; "now she is perfected."

"And you taught her," said Sir Hubert, bending over her.

A smile and a faint blush overspread the fair face, and the blue eyes grew dark with love.

"It came to me from heaven, and I could not forget," she answered.

True love was born in her, and she had not forgotten; but she had still so much to learn, the sweetness of daily communion, the fulness of a dual life. Instinct or something higher had drawn these two together, and before many days were over Hubert Pennington knew and

worshipped the pure soul of her he was to call his wife, and she too was perfected in love.

"Ruby, we have no one to ask," said Horace. "We have sought and found you; I cannot bear you out of my sight, and the only way of keeping you and holding you is to get married at once. There is the chaplain at Peshawur, the nearest station. If you consent we will start to-morrow. It took us twenty days to get here, it will take us almost double to return with you, but then it will be *with* you, my darling."

So they went forth, those four, and journeyed homewards. Rhookia went with them. Baasha Singh and Shir Singh accompanied them on their way as far as Amritzir, for Azile had said,—

"I would see my white marble palace once again."

They took her there, and as she stood gazing down upon the lovely gardens, surrounded by her dear ones, she said softly,—

"I stood outside the gates of Paradise; now, through love, I have entered in."

* * * * *

"Hubert, you will not part us yet, you will come to Woodlands with Azile and bide with us for a time?" pleaded Ruby, as the great ship which had borne them across the ocean neared the English coast.

"I shall be very glad to do so," answered Sir Hubert. "Basset Hall is by no means ready for its mistress, and it will be hard for my White Dove to settle down in a strange land amongst strange people."

"Nothing will be hard to me with you and Ruby beside me," answered Azile, a glow of happiness lighting up her face.

This home-coming was pure joy to her, whereas to Ruby there was a mingling of joy and sorrow. The

thought of those who were no more made her cling with ever-increasing tenderness to the young sister who had so lately come into her life. She was almost jealous of Sir Hubert.

"If only you had not been in such a hurry to fall in love with her!" she said one day reproachfully.

Sir Hubert and Horace laughed, the latter saying,—

"Why, Ruby, I have been in love with you ever since you were a little girl, but you do not suppose every man will wait as long."

"No, I do not," answered Ruby; "you have been very patient."

She put her hand in his, smiling up at him, though her eyes were full of tears, and Horace thought, as Jacob did in days of old, "the years seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

The whole county was in a state of excitement when it became known that Squire Bracewell's son and Sir Hubert Pennington were bringing their young brides home to Woodlands. Every hand was held out to bid them welcome.

The Princess Azile's story was repeated from mouth to mouth, and the charm of her presence soon won all hearts.

"See the princess," said the little children, running out of the cottage-doors and standing with their fingers in their mouths staring, as the two beautiful sisters wandered together through the village.

To say that Kate was happy when she held Ruby in her arms once more is but faintly to depict her feelings.

"My dearest, forgive me," she said, "for all my jealous thoughts of you because of that wealth, the possession of which I so envied. I know now how little it can avail us in dire extremity, and yet it is good, very good."

"I do not know why it is good or evil," said Azile softly. "You must teach me, Kate."

For many months the sisters remained together at Woodlands, and were very happy; more especially when a little girl was born to Ruby, and they called her "Aimée," after that dead mother whom neither of them remembered.

During this time Sir Hubert carried out great alterations at Basset Hall.

"I cannot give you a marble palace, dear," he said to his wife, "only an English home made beautiful by love."

He decided to throw up his commission, finding that the management of his wife's vast Indian fortune and his own estates would be more than sufficient occupation.

So it came to pass, on a July day, two years later, he was standing with Azile on the terrace of that once neglected, uncared-for home, Basset Hall, now bathed in sunshine, the windows thrown wide open, whilst beneath stretched lawns and gardens, aglow with flowers and shrubs, great trees casting broad shadows on the velvet greensward.

"Hubert, how could you say our home would not be beautiful?" said Azile, linking her arm in her husband's. "I think it the most beautiful place in the world."

"My darling," he answered, "I had no reason to love Basset in the old days, but now it is my delight; *our* home, and our son's heritage."

He looked to where Rhookia was pacing slowly up and down the gravel path, a fair, curly-headed child in her arms.

Yes, they were happy, those two. Whatever shadows the past had had, or the future might have for them, the present was all joy.

To Sir Hubert there was nothing in the world so fair as the woman by his side; without her, the old place now so beautiful would still have been a desert.

She had been lovely when they first met, but, in her early womanhood, she was grandly beautiful. She had desired life, and it had come to her in all its glory;

from her gracious hands she let fall on others something of the love and wealth with which she was so richly dowered.

"Let us walk over to the rectory and see if Kate has come home," she said; and they strolled across the lawns side by side.

"I often wonder whether Kate is really happy," said Sir Hubert.

"I am sure she is," answered Azile, "especially since you gave the rectory of Basset to her father, thus easing his burdens, and she has taken up that work amongst the children in London, with Lina Humphrey. But here she comes to answer for herself."

"Kate," she said, going quickly forward, "Hubert wants to know if you are really happy?"

Kate laughed, and answered,—

"You are thinking of my discontented days, Hubert. I am still of the same opinion that neither you nor Ruby know how hard it is to have one's hands tied and to see those we love suffer. Yes, I am happy, because Love has passed my way and made all things easy to me. I can smooth rough paths and make sad faces glad. In the dark sunless alleys of our great city little children's white faces look up at me and smile, asking, 'What has the White Dove sent us to-day?' Oh! yes, I am very happy, and they are happy."

"Ruby is happy too," said Azile thoughtfully.

"I should think so," replied Kate, "with her little Aimée."

"Aimée, love," repeated Azile softly; "my mother was well named; we have all learnt the power of Love."

"Indeed she was," responded Sir Hubert, "for Love rules the world."

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